

## HUSSERL'S CONCEPT OF SUBJECTIVITY

By

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### I

Subjectivity ordinarily means the experiences of the subject. It lays stress on the purely mental side of experience as opposed to objectivity. In its narrowest sense it can go to the extreme of denying that mind can know objects at all and this position paves the way to subjective idealism and solipsism.

The search for a criterion of the mental leads to the investigation into subjective experiences. Now, what are the core characteristics of subjectivity? Few would deny that a conscious being is aware of its experiences whenever it is conscious. It is also natural to suppose that where there is awareness there is a subject whose awareness it is. The subject is that to which the objects and contents of consciousness are presented; it is the owner of its experiences, the thing which thinks, acts, perceives; the thing which feels and wills. While it may be natural to think that consciousness harbours a subject-object distinction, whether it actually does so is another matter entirely.

Philosophers deeply disagree on how to characterize what is private to subjective experiences. Some hold that the existence of subjective experiences indicates that these are peculiar events that do not occur in the public space-time world that everyone shares, and has equal access to, but occur only in a private

world that each subject has exclusively to himself, which he cannot share with others, and to which no one else has access. Ryle he called this view, with what he admits to be of deliberate abusiveness, “the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine.” He writes:

Human bodies are in space and are subject to the mechanical laws which govern all other bodies in space. Bodily processes and states can be inspected by external observers. So a man’s bodily life is ... a public affair ... But minds are not in space, nor are their operations, subject to mechanical laws. The workings of our mind are not witnessable by other observers; its career is private. Only I can take cognizance of the states and processes of my own mind ... mental world.<sup>1</sup>

But even so adamant a critic of privacy as Ryle admits the existence of some private phenomena, chiefly, dreams, daydreams sensations, imaginings, etc.

In ancient thought, in terms of the subject-object distinction, it is fair to say that ancient philosophers mainly stress the object pole. Both Plato and Aristotle share the similar commitment to a conception of knowledge as objective. Yet a concept of the subject is silently presupposed in their thought. An idea of the subject looms large in Greek philosophy, for instance, in the Republic, in Plato’s discussion of the ideal state, modeled on the structure of the mind, and in Aristotle’s view of ethics that explicitly invokes a philosophical anthropology or concept of man.

Subjectivity has taken various forms throughout the history of modern philosophy. It occupies the central place in the intellectual life of our times. Subjectivity is a vast topic. The importance of this topic and its full extent and difficulty requires a historical inquiry. To provide a general history or even an outline of the conception of subjectivity is not our intention. We shall only touch upon some important milestones. We propose to begin with two major accounts of the notion of subjectivity. Even though the clarification of subjective experiences occupies the center of Husserl's phenomenology, yet philosophers of different persuasions before him have taken up discussions on the matter justifying the characterization "the subjective tradition".

Descartes and Leibnitz gave essential shape to the first explicit metaphysical doctrine of subjectivity. Subjectivity invariably implies the identification of the subject with the Cartesian *Cogito* and provides a fruitful starting point with Descartes. It led to and culminated in the absolute Hegelian Subject. The classical idea of subjectivity consists in the capacity – the quintessential human capacity – to be the conscious, responsible author of one's thoughts and acts, in short, to be their foundation or center. The Cartesian aim was to make the human subject "the master and possessor of nature." For Descartes, to *Cogitare* was already to *agere*, that is, to bring the Real *close* to oneself in order to subject it to rational examination and to bring out its truth.

Leibnitz's contribution to the development of subjectivity consists in emphasizing it as activity; what essentially defines the monad is force. The spirit of the notion of subjectivity, as the attempt to conceive of reality exclusively in relation to man, posited as foundation, as subject, was already present in Descartes. The same spirit is recognized more fully *still* when being or substance *itself* is

conceived as subject, that is, when subjectivity defines the very structure of reality. Thus, we see that in Leibnitz, force - understood as *activity*, as self-manifestation – became the essence of everything. In Descartes, subjectivity arises in man’s experience of himself as *ego cogito sum*, that is, as subject [as I think, I exist]. What in the classical antiquity and even more in the middle ages, was the “place of God” becomes, in the modern era, the “place of man.” The Hegelian reduction of the real to the rational was already foreshadowed in Leibnitz. Such a reduction was not conceivable in Descartes, owing to the Cartesian emphasis on the creation of eternal truths: the idea that God could have created a world that was inconsistent with the principles of our rationality profoundly relativized the identification of the real with the rational.

No discussion of subjectivity can be worthwhile without a discussion of Kant’s views. The Kantian concept of subjectivity is closely connected with his Copernican Revolution. According to Kant, knowledge is possible only on the supposition that objects conform to our knowledge, since, as he also says, reason can know only what it produces. If knowledge is possible if and only if the subject produces what it knows, then the Copernican Revolution commits Kant to an active view of subjectivity as well as to a relation of identity between subject and object. If the subject produces what it knows, then in knowing, the subject obviously knows what it has produced. In other words, objectivity is cognizable by, or transparent to the subject, hence, knowledge, since objectivity depends on, and is identical with subjectivity. The identity between the knower and the known, subject and object, subjectivity and objectivity, which Hegel called “the principle of speculation”, runs like a red thread from the critical philosophy through later German idealism of Schelling and Fichte.

Hegel's Phenomenology, provides a threefold analysis of the subject of experience as the immediate subject, then as all humanity rising to consciousness through the spiritual journey and finally as substance becoming subject or the absolute.

However, the history of subjectivity cannot be restricted to the Cartesian or monadological *cogito* which prefigures the Hegelian absolute subject. There is a rival image of subjectivity proffered by the empiricist *cogito* as defined by Locke, Berkeley and Hume. There is an essential difference between the Cartesian *cogito* which may be described as the rationalist *cogito* and the empiricist *cogito*. The latter is characterized as the openness of mind to sense-impressions, sensitizing the subject, so to say, when the Cartesian model of subjectivity proceeds by rationalizing the subject, detaching the mind from the senses in order to discover the innate ideas of the self, and by reflecting about them to bring back what has first been doubted. Such a model of the subject is foreign to the empiricist. According to the latter, all our simple ideas, in their first appearance, are derived from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they actually represent.

## II

Needless to say, this issue of subjectivity, bearing as it does, on the most basic structural features of consciousness is of deep interest to those whose sole concern is the elucidation of precisely those features; we have in mind philosophers working in the phenomenological tradition, the prominent among them being Edmund Husserl. Husserl, the founder of this tradition, initially found

it difficult to make up his mind. In the *Logical Investigations* he elaborated a quasi-Humean position – a bundle theory, so to say. Unable to discern anything resembling a “subject” in his experience, he found no reason to posit such a thing, and held that the unity of consciousness was a product of relationships among the constituent parts of consciousness. Husserl proclaims:

The ego is ... nothing peculiar, floating above many experiences: it is simply identical with their interconnected unity.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to the alleged ego-center, Husserl adds:

I must frankly confess ... that I am quite unable to find this ego, this primitive necessary center of [intentional] relations. The only thing that I can take note of ... [is] the empirical ego and its empirical relations to its own experiences ...<sup>3</sup>

We must clarify what Husserl means by “empirical ego” or “empirical consciousness”. According to Husserl, it means an “embodied consciousness” – a psychic feature of a person. The “I” to which ordinary experience refers is an embodied consciousness, a consciousness that takes itself to be a feature of a person “in the world.” This “I” Husserl calls “empirical consciousness” or “empirical ego.” For Husserl of the *Logical Investigations*, the empirical consciousness is no more than a string of psychic episodes. That such a string of experiences composes a single consciousness or ego consists in these experiences

being interpreted in a law-like way, which fits with other empirical (psychological or psycho-physical) laws.

Having been committed to the view that consciousness is “nothing but” a temporal series of interconnected experiences, early Husserl declared his failure to find an abiding conscious ego or an ego that can occupy the ontological “unifying role” such an ego was supposed to occupy with respect to its acts. Husserl explained the composition of the empirical ego after the fashion of Hume. In the *Logical Investigations* he mainly compared himself to a class of conscious acts, viz., the intentional acts. An act is directed to an object. But it is found not to be emerging from a source or center of reference – the “I” or the “ego”. Thus, as we have already stated early Husserl was in good company with Hume, who declared his own failure to find an abiding self corresponding to impressions.

In his later writings, Husserl makes a complete turn about regarding the ego. Commenting on his earlier inability to find an ego reflectively, in the second volume of the revised edition of the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl footnotes the paragraph stated above, saying, “I have since managed to find it.”<sup>4</sup> The “it” refers to the pure Ego, the primitive, necessary center of relations. However, to find the “it” Husserl has to bring in reductions beyond the *epoché*.

We have discussed in details the *epoché* or bracketing of the natural attitude in the preceding chapter. We have seen that epoche, as it applies to the natural standpoint, is to turn our attention away from the objects in the natural world so that we can focus on those fundamental evidences on which the natural beliefs of these objects are based. *Epoché* signifies a decisive turn in Husserl’s philosophy. Subsequently, he calls for a transcendental phenomenology, which seeks to clarify

the conditions for the possibility of the empirical knowledge of being and eventually discloses the sense of being or existence as such. This transcendental investigation requires a new method which Husserl calls reduction. It has several levels each of which is called a reduction. We should, however, note that words like *epoché*, and reduction are not always kept separate in Husserl's writings.

Although we have bracketed the natural attitude as it applies to the objects of our everyday intentions, we have not bracketed that attitude so far it applies to ourselves and our inner experiences. We continue to affirm our belief in ourselves as natural persons, at least, insofar as we are psychologically functioning conscious egos. In his *The Idea of Phenomenology*<sup>5</sup> Husserl has said that inner events are no less natural or objective than are things or events in the outer world. Hence, Husserl has in mind a specific bracketing of a psychological interpretation of what is given in conscious acts or intentions. Setting aside the ego with the intentions, which make up the ego's psychological reality is now called for. This reduction is called psychological inasmuch as it lays bare the kind of data, the contents of experience that would be the subject matter of the psychology of inner experiences – designated as phenomenological psychology. Its aim is to reflect on the psychological reality independent of whether it corresponds to the external world – freedom from existence-commitment being the essential feature of phenomenology.

But psychological reduction alone is not sufficient. Talk of the ego and its experiences still presuppose the truth of the general thesis of natural attitude. The reduction takes place within the natural attitude. Hence, to reveal the pure, absolute being of consciousness, every empirical trace is to be removed. The revelation of the ego and its acts, purified of all empirical elements, is called transcendental



reduction. It leaves only the “pure” or “transcendental” Ego and its pure acts. Reflection on these transcendental elements of consciousness Husserl calls “pure” or “transcendental”. What is a reflection? Husserl says in the *Ideas I*: “Reflections are experiences.” He also says: “It is an immanent apprehension of the essences, sifting the glance from the objectivity to subjective consciousness”.<sup>6</sup>

Even after this second level of reduction is achieved, Husserl would look for the transcendental features of the ego that are essential to it as subject of its intentional experiences. These essential features of the ego and its intentional experiences are isolated by means of what Husserl calls “eidetic reduction”. It proceeds by imagination of possible cases rather than actual cases. Husserl calls it “eidetic variation”. One considers in imagination possible changes an individual can undergo while remaining an instance of the given type or essence. The whole point of imaginative free variation is to allow the essences to come to view and anything merely contingent to drop away. This reminds us of Descartes’ example of the wax. When all the accidental features are varied, the essence of extension is left over. Eidos means “type”, “essence”. The eidetic reduction yields those features of the transcendently reduced pure Ego and its acts which are necessarily shared with any other ego’s acts of the same kind. These features are universal and necessary. The apprehension of essence Husserl calls “essential insight”, “eidetic intuition” or “ideation”. In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl calls it “free variation” playing into the field of “non-actualities”, “the realm of the as-if”. In the *Ideas I*, Husserl calls it “fiction” and makes the poignant remark that fiction is the source whence the knowledge of ‘eternal’ truth draws its sustenance.”<sup>7</sup>

Now of all the reductions the transcendental reduction is at once the most important of Husserl’s methodological devices. It is crucially important because

the transcendental reduction is what explicitly reveals the pure structures of consciousness that are the subject matter of Husserl's phenomenological research. A shift in Husserl's terminology also indicates that something new is going on. In stead of consciousness *simpliciter*, he now speaks of "pure consciousness", "transcendental subjectivity", "constitutive act" and "inter-subjectivity" and in stead of acts or "intentional, mental processes", now of "intentional achievements" or even "intentional life" and so on.

Before we proceed any further, we want to note one thing. It is that when one hears of "phenomenological reductions" "one invariably thinks of a bracketing the belief in the being of the world and also of a procedure that discloses a transcendental ego with its acts, hyle, noemata, etc. However, this is only Husserl's later conception of phenomenological reduction, elaborated in such works, Books I and II of *Ideas* and the *Cartesian Meditations*.

Some Husserl scholars have drawn our attention to Husserl's original formulation of phenomenological reduction in the *Logical Investigations* by which Husserl means something completely different. Quentin Smith has drawn our attention to that.<sup>8</sup>

Smith begins by saying that the phenomenological reduction is the reduction of something *to* something else. *What* is reduced is the *empirical ego*. The empirical ego "is a real whole, in reality made up of manifold parts, each of which is said to be experiences."<sup>9</sup> In his idea that the empirical ego is what is reduced in phenomenological reduction, Husserl does not differ from his later theory of reduction. Where Husserl does differ from his later conception is in his idea of

what the empirical ego is *reduced to*. What it is reduced to is the “phenomenologically reduced ego”. This phenomenologically reduced ego is not the transcendental ego of the *Ideas I* or of the *Cartesian Meditations*. It is the empirical ego insofar as it is adequately given to inner perceptions.<sup>10</sup> Having traversed the different steps in the reduction of the empirical ego to the phenomenologically reduced ego in the *Investigations*, Smith concludes as follows:

In the *Logical Investigations* the phenomenological reduction is not a bracketing of the being of the world so as to attain a self-enclosed transcendental ego ... Rather it is reduction that attains an inwardly perceived, retained, recollected and empirically assumed empirical ego that is comprised of its own acts and sensations. This phenomenologically reduced ego is not something over and beyond the reduced acts and sensations, nothing other than the synthetic unity of the acts and sensations themselves. As Husserl writes, “The physically reduced ego is therefore nothing peculiar, floating above many experiences: it is simply identical with their own interconnected unity.”<sup>11</sup>

To return to our previous deliberations. We have said that Husserl does not always distinguish between the *epoché* of the *Ideas I* and the transcendental reduction because he seems to use these two words interchangeably. Yet, there are two aspects or phases of the phenomenological reduction: the “reduction of” the natural attitude, which is excluding in character and the “reduction to”, the attainment of the sphere of immanence. The sphere is the sphere of reduced

phenomena, that is, a state of phenomena in the state of transparency to consciousness; a state characterized by “self-evidence”(Evidenz) and self-givenness, words which first appear in the Logical Investigations, V and VI and in almost all of Husserl’s later writings. Phenomenological reduction leaves us with pure phenomena which make no claim to transcendent status. Its function is to loosen the hold on us of trans-phenomenal elements - elements which are conceivable exclusively in causal or substantial terms. We put out of play the natural or naïve belief in the independent existence of the objects of consciousness and thus allow us to realize that the meanings of these objects can be made evident without recourse to their existence. Husserl’s turn to a transcendental analysis of the perceptual world takes root in the conception of phenomenology as interrogation, as interrogation not only of facts or things but of meanings. Husserl is able to explode the “fetshicism” of things and to see their meaning as the accomplishment of human consciousness.

The view which Husserl embraces in the *Ideas I* is the outcoming or a reversal in the relation between consciousness and the world in general. In our natural, commonsense ontology minds are ontologically dependent on physical nature. Husserl purports to show that consciousness is an absolute existent. This brings in the concept of *epoché*, the “bracketing” of the natural world. This leaves us with a “residuum”, transcendental consciousness and the whole natural world exists as an intentional correlate of consciousness. Husserl says:

So much is clear from the outset that after carrying out this[transcendental] reduction through, we shall never stumble across the pure Ego as an experience among others within the flux of manifold experiences which

survives as transcendental residuum; nor shall we meet it as a constitutive bit of experience appearing with the experience of which it is an integral part and again disappearing. The ego appears to be permanently, even necessarily, there, and this permanence is obviously not that of a stolid, unshifting experience, of a “fixed idea”... In principle, at any rate, every *cogitatio* can change ... But in contrast the pure Ego appears to be *necessary* in principle, and as that which remains absolutely self-identical in all real and possible changes of experience, it can *in no sense* be reckoned *as a real part or phase* of the experiences themselves.<sup>12</sup>

This looks like a radical departure by Husserl from his earlier position on the ego-center. Not only has he “managed to find it”, but he takes it now to be “necessary in principle”. Husserl in the *Ideas* I upholds the notion of pure Ego as distinguished from the psychological or empirical ego. The ego is specifically admitted as “Ego-Subject”. In the *Logical Investigations*, the ego was regarded as the complex of real, conscious events or acts, but not as the subject of these events or acts. In the *Ideas*, there is a real shifting of attitude with regard to the ego. Here the ego becomes a subject and ceases to be a bundle of perceptions. Apperceived in the natural manner, the ego is the ego of my psychological subjectivity. It is the real self in the body and therefore a part of the real world. This very ego, considered strictly as an intentional agent Husserl calls “transcendental Ego” or “transcendental I” or “transcendental subject”. The choice of the word “ego”, we are told, is to emphasize his conviction that consciousness so considered is an

intentionally enduring *entity*, and not merely a succession of “intentional episodes”.<sup>13</sup>

We intend to insert a note on Husserl’s terminology. Husserl calls “transcendental” that by means of which we experience transcendent entities. By “transcendent” Husserl means what is transcendent to consciousness; it refers to anything that we experience as having more to it than is given in a finite amount of experience, that is, things that are experienced through perspectives. The word “transcendental” in Husserl, characterizes the “purely” intentional ego through the intentional activity of which we become aware of transcendent things. Thus, my awareness of myself as an embodied individual in the world, in being awareness, is accomplished by the transcendental Ego. But my being in the world as an embodied individual is transcendent to consciousness. It comes close to Kant’s idea of transcendental which means the condition of the possibility of the transcendent. There is another sense of Husserl’s use of the word “transcendental” which, it is observed, is formally equivalent to the Kantian use, namely, “critical”, a critique of the use of transcendental, phenomenological concepts, questioning the legitimacy of their use for the experiencing of our experiences. In this sense, “transcendental” means absolute opposition to dogmatism, not only dogmatism of metaphysics which Kant attacked but also a critique of the hidden metaphysical implications of the modern anti-metaphysical positions.<sup>14</sup>

It is also noteworthy that in the *Ideas*, Husserl does not use the expression “transcendental Ego”; he speaks of “pure Ego”. He also does not attribute to the pure Ego the functions later attributed to the transcendental Ego or Subject. Even when Husserl describes the transcendental constitution which is carried on

different levels, the expression “the originally giving consciousness” is used to refer to the “the subject” of the deepest layer of constitution and the expression “transcendental Ego” or ‘transcendental Self’ is not yet used. Joseph Kockelmans notes that the distinction between the pure Ego and the transcendental Ego was introduced by Husserl when he became aware of the possibilities of a phenomenological psychology in addition to transcendental phenomenology. At that time it became clear that a distinction had to be made between the phenomenological reduction and the transcendental reduction and correspondingly between the pure and the transcendental Egos.<sup>15</sup> These distinctions were introduced for the first time in his works, *First Philosophy* and *Phenomenological Psychology*. From then on these expressions have become a part of the basic terminology of Husserl’s phenomenology. This corroborates the observation of Husserl scholars that every concept is thought out in many ways and on different levels. The concepts pure and transcendental had a long gestation period starting from the *Ideas I* before their final form is achieved.

The new insights concerning the pure ego which is merely alluded to in the second edition of the *Logical Investigations* is developed in greater details in *Ideas I* and still later in the *Cartesian Meditations*. Husserl there states that the pure Ego belongs necessarily to every actual experience insofar as the Ego’s glance goes through every actual experience towards the object. In that sense one can say that the “I think” must be able to accompany all my presentations. But Husserl also says that, although every *cogito* is characterized as an act of the Ego, the experiencing Ego, taken in and by itself, cannot be “made into an object of inquiry on its *own* account.”<sup>16</sup>

We have seen that in the early course of his development Husserl interested in discerning the mark of the psychological [the German word *psychiessh* gets translated into English as mental]. For him, the intentional experience is the mark of the mental. Beings without such experience ‘would not be called psychic.’ Of course, it is the term “consciousness” which forms the focus of his interest. Consciousness, by no means is a self-enclosed sphere with its representations locked up in their own inner world. On the contrary consciousness is, according to its own essential structure object-directed. Thus, for it, the criterion of the mental or subjective experiences has nothing to do with non-spatiality or internalism or privacy, with its privileged access.

The philosophers mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Kant, Schelling, Fichte, Hegel are all German thinkers. From the perspective of German idealistic philosophy, the “subject” and “subjectivity” stand at the beginning of the philosophical enterprise. In Husserl’s early philosophy, subjectivity hardly played any role. He was concerned with the investigation with the directedness of consciousness. His move in the *Ideas I* to place the subject at the starting point of his philosophizing amounts to an “emigration into the German tradition

In the *Ideas I* Husserl upholds the notion of pure Ego as distinguished from the psychological or empirical ego. The ego is specifically admitted as the “Ego-subject”. In the *Logical Investigations* the ego was regarded as the complex of real conscious events or acts but not as the subject of those acts. In the *Ideas* there has been a real shifting of attitude with regard to the ego. Here the ego becomes a subject and ceases to be a bundle of perceptions. Husserl draws clue from Kant’s essential insight that the empirical ego necessarily presupposes the transcendental Ego as its foundation. But Kant does not regard the psychological ego as the



phenomenal manifestation of the transcendental Ego which in itself is unknown and unknowable. For Husserl, the difference between the psychological ego and the transcendental Ego is one of meaning. Apperceived in the natural manner, the ego is the psychological ego, but when grasped in the attitude of reduction the ego appears to be the transcendental one. The transcendental Ego is always open to self-observation and is never presupposed. In the natural attitude of mind the ego is observed as a natural reality, as a worldly being; but in the phenomenological attitude it is observed as the ultimate ground in and for which the world including me as a psychological subject is constituted. As Husserl writes:

Therefore, 'I' the constituting Ego, am not identical with the ego who is already worldly, not identical with myself as a physical being and my psychic life, the psychophysical and worldly life of consciousness is not identical with my transcendental Ego, in which the world with everything physical and psychic that belongs to it is constituted for me. That means the essential Ego is the transcendental or pure Ego and the psychological 'ego' is limitation put on it and falsely regarded as the real nature of the ego in the natural attitude of mind.<sup>17</sup>

Husserl claims to have a number of observations on the pure Ego situated as it is within the realm of pure consciousness. In the *Ideas I* he states those observations as follows;

1. The pure Ego is not a general ego – the self does not function in general or anything like that. It is the personal Ego of the individual, concerned with the

philosophizing self that performs the reduction and it is a separate one in each separate field of experience. On the basis of the concept of plurality of pure Egos, Husserl, in *Ideas I* and in his later works, particularly, the *Cartesian Meditations* developed the concept of monadic Egos or the concept of community of pure Egos. The concept of the community of pure Egos becomes a celebrated theme in Husserl's constitutive phenomenology.

2. The pure Ego is the source in which the acts of experience originate. It is a permanent feature or form of the *cogito* that it is necessarily related to the ego experience as its subject and source. The "being directed towards", "the being busied with", "adopting an attitude", has this *of necessity* wrapped in its very essence, that it is just something "from the Ego", or in the reverse direction, "to the Ego", and this Ego is the *pure* Ego and no reduction can get any grip on it.<sup>18</sup>

3. The field of pure consciousness comprises a series of acts, actual and potential. An act becomes actual when it is initiated by the Ego and the Ego enjoys the consciousness of it. But all other acts are also acts of the Ego though the Ego does not live in them actually. The Ego participates in these acts ideally. The acts which ideally belong to the Ego constitute the field of the ego's freedom. Thus, while no one act is absolutely necessary for the being of the Ego, the Ego is absolutely necessary for the being of any and every act even when the act is a mere potential act. Considering the position of the Ego in relation to the acts, Husserl ascribes a peculiar kind of transcendence to the pure Ego itself, the pure Ego is "non-constituted transcendence".

4. Though the pure Ego transcends any particular act to be the Ego of all other acts and is not a real part or phase of the experience, yet, apart from its "ways of being

related”, or “ways of behaving”, it is completely empty of essential components. It has no content that could be unraveled; it is in and for itself, indescribable: pure Ego and nothing further.”<sup>19</sup> It is something that “transcends” the acts. But the “something is indescribable”. The acts of empirical consciousness, on the other, are necessarily related to the Ego. The pure Ego lies in them and operates in them. It behaves in different ways in so far as it relates itself to the acts and thereby to the objects of experience. The pure Ego is variously describable only when we see it as living in the acts. But if we ask: Is the pure Ego something over and beyond the stream of pure consciousness? Husserl would not admit such a pure Ego.

The most elaborate description of his conception of the Ego is found in the *Cartesian Meditations*.

In the *Ideas I* Husserl upholds the notion of pure Ego as distinguished from the psychological or empirical ego. The ego is specifically admitted as the ego-subject

Even before the *Cartesian Meditations* were undertaken the specifically Cartesian question posed is: What would be left unaffected and would perhaps exist as apodictic if the whole world did not exist? Husserl responds that in reflection about the possible non-being of the world, the ego, as that which experiences the world along with its experiencing life, was presupposed. “It thereby proves for Husserl that the ego, with its life is a sphere of being which can be posited by and for itself - even if the whole world does not exist and even if every position taken on its existence is inhibited.”<sup>20</sup>

### III

The *Cartesian Meditations* provides a good over-all picture of transcendental phenomenology. The motifs of Cartesianism are strongly or faintly imprinted in different texts of Husserl, e.g., *Logical Investigations*, *Ideas I*, *First Philosophy* and in different unpublished treatises and lectures. The *Cartesian Meditations* consists of a series of lectures delivered by Husserl at the Sorbonn, Paris in 1928. Beginning with a generous expression of indebtedness to Descartes Husserl portrays phenomenology as the historical completion of the subjective movement inaugurated by Descartes' *Meditations*. Husserl begins by saying that his Cartesian Meditations are an explicit attempt to renew Descartes' programme of a reconstruction of knowledge. Husserl characterizes Descartes' aim as "a complete reforming of philosophy into a science grounded on an absolute foundation."<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the first order of business for the Husserlian phenomenologist is to locate "those cognitions that are first in themselves and can support the whole storied edifice of human knowledge", with a view to "constructing on their basis a science governed by the idea of a definitive system of knowledge ..."<sup>22</sup> The programme that Husserl sets for himself is that phenomenology is to be characterized as transcendental phenomenology of knowledge. However, the theory of knowledge is inseparable from the philosophy of the ego *qua* the knowing subject. Hence, Husserl's phenomenology is not only "transcendental theory of knowledge" but also "a science of concrete transcendental subjectivity"; it is not only epistemology, but also at the same time "pure egology". Here, too, Husserl intends to follow the lead of Descartes' *Meditations* attempting to "renew with greater intensity the radicalness of their spirit ... . to uncover thereby for the first time the genuine sense of the necessary regress to the ego."<sup>23</sup>

He says, phenomenology may be termed neo-Cartesianism.

Husserl proposes to begin with Descartes' point, the pure *ego cogito* and lead from there to transcendental phenomenology. The *ego cogito* indicates the way to the province of transcendental subjectivity, which is the domain of certain and first being. This is in consonance with Husserl's manner of speaking in the *Ideas I* that phenomenology as an apriori science, sets out the indissoluble essential structures of transcendental subjectivity which persists in and through all imaginable modifications. Notwithstanding this reliance on Descartes' radicalism, the taking up of Descartes' attitude. Husserl does not, as we shall see, share any of the doctrinal contents of his philosophy.

Even though the *Cartesian Meditations* shares and reiterates many of the themes and contents of *Ideas I*, this work is important, on its own merit, for a number of reasons.

1. Criticism of Descartes' method of doubt,
2. Way to the attainment of the realm of transcendental subjectivity in respect of its universal structures,
3. The constitutive activity of consciousness and
4. The analysis of inter-subjectivity.

1. Husserl criticizes Descartes for failing to realize to the fullest extent the implications of the absoluteness of the *Cogito*. Descartes fails to take the transcendental turn. The error that Husserl detects in Descartes is to conclude from the *cogito* to the existence of a substantial subject: whereas if Descartes had confined himself to the data of consciousness he would have found *in the cogito* only the essence of subjectivity – that is, pure consciousness, pure cogitations..

Husserl turns to Descartes with new eyes. Descartes, through his method of doubt, was mistaken in treating the epistemological subject as the same kind of entity ontologically, as an object in the world. He says: Husserl seeks to rectify the error. According to him, what the *cogito* first contributes is an apodictic certitude of the subject afforded by the very fact of consciousness. It is not the certitude which Descartes thought he had found in a substantial subject of consciousness: it is rather the certitude of a subject free from all the contingent elements of factuality, leaving only “pure consciousness” or subjectivity as such. The *ego cogito* becomes meaningful only when it becomes *ego cogito cogitatum*. The Cartesian certitude, in Husserl’s opinion, only becomes fruitful when the *ego cogito* is given a content. It becomes fruitful because the content is known with the same apodictic certitude as the *cogito* itself. It becomes *ego cogito cogitatum*.

This necessitates the development of a technique, *epoché* [dealt with in the foregoing discussions]. The *epoché*, which Husserl reintroduces in the *Cartesian Meditations* does not always remain separate from reduction. It will “put in parenthesis” the transcendent realm. The *epoché* is clearly in a certain sense Cartesian doubt. But Husserl insists that it is something essentially different. To doubt reality is to take a position with regard to it and this Husserl will not do. Reality simply does not enter into the question of *what* things are. Here another difference with Cartesianism emerges. In Descartes’ doubt the purpose is to eliminate it when certitude is gained. Doubt is provisional. On the contrary, once *epoché* is put into operation it is never retracted.

2. *Epoché* or phenomenological reduction discloses the transcendental structures. The transcendental subjectivity effected by reduction is not a metaphysical subject – a subject in the Cartesian sense. It is subject in the sense of

conscious experience, “consciousness” in the “widest connotation”, which “includes all experiences” whether they be of pains, trees or numbers, in their intentional bi-polarity. According to Husserl the transcendental subject cannot be dissolved into nature for in that case what gives nature its sense would be missing “The attempt to conceive the universe of true being as something lying outside the universe of possible consciousness, possible knowledge...possible evidence... is nonsensical.”<sup>24</sup> We have mentioned that in the *Cartesian Meditations* at the outset is the demand that philosophy begins with apodictic evidence. The evidence for the world is proved not to be apodictic, and the world is put in the “Cartesian overthrow”. The transcendental subjectivity remains and includes in itself the world as phenomenon. The word “includes” is metaphorical; it does not mean that the world is put into subjectivity as objects are put into a box. It means that the whole world, in all its meanings, has to be rethought as an accomplishment of subjectivity. Meaning, for Husserl, does not mean linguistic meaning, but signifies “giving meaning” or “articulating” or “constituting” objects of experience. The transcendental subjectivity is responsible not only for the meaning or sense, but it is consciousness for which there is a world. Husserl criticizes Descartes for his failure to take this transcendental turn, the pure sense of the transcendental *epoché* and consequently, his failure to penetrate the proper domain of philosophy – the transcendental level.

3. It is easy to suppose from the above that transcendental subjectivity as the universal, apriori source of objectivity is a readymade center of conscious activity which produces objectivity when the occasion arises. As Quentin Lauer says “A subject is not by the mere fact of being a subject the apriori source of *all* objectivity”<sup>25</sup> It is indeed the fact that subjectivity constitutes every kind of objectivity. That is truly objective which has been constituted in accordance with

the necessary laws of subjectivity. Still in order that subjectivity be the “evidence” of objectivity it must be known as thus constitutive. How can it be so known? Husserl’s answer is that subjectivity parallels objectivity so closely that it develops along with the latter. This is Husserl’s genetic phenomenology. Genesis does not mean origin. It means development, or manifestation. Complex objectivities cannot be constituted unless subjectivity is rendered gradually capable of the more complicated through the constitution of simple objectivities. The subject is precisely the subject in constituting objects. In constituting the object the subject contributes itself. We may speak of two sides of constitution. The transcendental subject is inseparable from its acts. Not only that, it is also inseparable from the objective correlates of the acts. Objects are objects *only* for the subject. Conversely, the subject is subject because it has objects. It is constituted a subject by its relation to object. “The ego is the identical pole of the subjective processes but ‘this’ centering Ego is not an empty pole of identity.”<sup>26</sup> It is not a substantial Cartesian subject. It is the substrate of a vital series of habits, the flowing life of experiences. The ego lives and has these experiences in question. The unity of the transcendental is more than the unity of the actual continuity of expressions. The continuity would be broken in deep sleep. The unity is the continued subjective identity in which every passing act of consciousness leaves the ego the potentiality capable of a subsequent act. Husserl explains this with an example. If I make a decision in favour of something the fleeting act passes out but the decision persists with me as long as the decision is accepted by me whether I become passive or sink into heavy sleep or live in another act. These dispositional mental states give the ego a continued subjective identity constituting it as a stable and abiding ego on the basis of its own convictions. This permits the subject to say “I”, not to be an abstract subjectivity but a concrete subject. Thus, in *Cartesian Meditations* we notice a shift in Husserl’s concept of the Ego. In his earlier writings he had



recognized the self-presence, presence to itself, of the *Cogito* and had stressed that one's intuitive grasp of inner mental processes were apodictic. Now he comes to see that the Ego is given in temporal profiles thus beginning to speak of the historicity of the Ego.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Husserl comes to believe that the self-constitution of the Ego is the source of all other constitutions.

4. Husserl's concern with the analyses of inter-subjectivity are collected in three volumes of the *Husserliana*, XIII-XV which shows the extent of his interest in the subject. Here, we shall remain confined to his analysis in the *Cartesian Meditations* mainly. Husserl especially dealt with the topic in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation. In the *Ideas II*, published posthumously, Husserl would accept the claim that any consciousness of myself as a distinctive individual seems to involve some at least possible consciousness of another person. Husserl's question is how we can account for that consciousness of another person. Through the reduction that issue becomes problematized. The world cannot appear to me as it does to another person nor can that other person appear to me as he does for himself. In the natural attitude my consciousness of myself is in relation to other individuals; through the reduction that consciousness of other individuals needs to be understood. As Husserl puts it there: "*In the comprehensive experience of the existence of an other we understand him without further ado as a personal subject and as such in relation to objects to which we are also in relation.*"<sup>28</sup> The problem is: How does the other enter into my consciousness? How is the other constituted for me? There is the problem of the other in epistemology, the problem of the knowledge of other minds. This poses a problem for Husserl in view of his doctrine of transcendental subjectivity. This problem as seen by Quentin Lauer stands thus:

...the problem of the other, known as a subject is not confined to phenomenology. Every philosophy must recognize among its field of objects one object which is like none of the others; it is presented not only as known by the knower but also as knowing the knower. The difference is that to be subject means to have experiences; to be experienced as subject is to be experienced as having experiences. Somehow, then, the experiences of others must form part of my intentional life without at the same time being my experiences.<sup>29</sup>

According to Husserl, transcendental subjectivity is the transcendental sphere of I-myself. It is the sphere of radical privacy. I take myself as the only living conscious thing in the world. By bracketing everything that is alien I treat every psycho-physical organism in the world as if it has no subjectivity or living consciousness. In bracketing everything that not-me, all forms of life and activity that is not immediately intuited by my own consciousness must be bracketed as well, including all conscious life as well as all cultural objects. Things are only shapes with no consciousness attached to them. What I am reduced to is my own ego, my own structure of consciousness, what is actually to me given originally. And it is this alone which I hold as the apodictic evidence of transcendental self perception. In the Fifth Cartesian Meditation Husserl describes the transcendental reduction to “one’s own sphere” as follows:

*This reduction to my transcendental sphere of peculiar ownness or to my transcendental concrete I-myself, by abstraction from everything that*

transcendental constitution gives me as Other, has an unusual sense. I find myself differentiated and contrasted; myself and others. If I “abstract” ... from others, I “*alone*” remain.<sup>30</sup>

The reduction to the sphere of awareness eliminates anything living or conscious that is not me;[I even no longer engender experience of my own body. This means that only my ego is given absolutely whereas my body is given appreciatively. In reducing the world to exclude all that is alien to the self Husserl brackets the subjective life of others. What is given in terms of the world is not what is *ours* but what is *mine*. This unique stratum of my world is a founding stratum what Husserl calls the “first stratum” in my psyche. Husserl has frequently been accused of methodological solipsism. In such an interpretation Husserl’s suspension of belief in the existence of the external world and other minds leads to an inner domain in which “we forget the world in the phenomenological reduction in favor of inner experiences that are intelligible independently of their relation to the world.”<sup>31</sup> This claim is that Husserl then attempts to reconstruct the intersubjective world on the basis of this self, methodologically assumed to be alone. But it is important to note that the reduction to privacy is not the negation of the public. Husserl was not unaware of this problem. In the very beginning of the Fifth Meditation Husserl raises the problem whether the “meditating “I, the “absolute transcendental ego” do not become “*solus ipse*”. He raises the question:

But what about other egos, who surely are not a mere intending and intended *in me*, merely synthetic unities of possible verification *in me*, but , according to their sense,

precisely others? Have we not therefore done transcendental realism an injustice?<sup>32</sup>

However, as Husserl unfolds his reflections on the other, he observes that the transcendental ego is not a solipsistic ego. Solipsism, Husserl admits, is simply non-sensical for it posits that nothing exists outside the self. But the phenomenological ego reaches no such conclusion. If solipsism posits that nothing exists outside the self then Husserl concludes that phenomenological reduction does not *deny* existence but rather merely brackets existence. Reduction does not make a metaphysical or ontological judgement about existence. It rather withholds judgment by placing existence in suspension. Even more, for Husserl, others appear or present themselves to me within the transcendental field of inquiry. And it is by virtue of this transcendental clue that the human other comes to me from beyond the reach of my own absolutely given experience, in terms of what Husserl describes as the “noematic-ontic mode of givenness of the other.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, through the others appearance I am motivated not to experience the world as a private world, but rather as an inter-subjective one.

Husserl always insists that the sphere which comprises my own world represents the extreme limit which is attainable by phenomenological reduction. This is “first” and it must be attained in order to constitute the experience of “an other ego distinct from me.” Without having that latter idea I am not able to have the experience of an “objective world”. But I do not need the experience of an objective world or of another ego in order to have “my own world”. That “my own world”, and the very conditions of my meaningful experience, presuppose other selves and an objective world which can as a matter of fact never be suspended, are

facts which are genetically prior to the phenomenological method, and are not altered by the adoption of that method.

Husserl distinguishes the “nature” which remains after the “reduction” from the nature of the sciences, which abstract all psychic elements. In my own reduced world, or “nature”, I find my body, distinguished from all other things by the fact that it is organic. Body-image is constituted according to tactile sensations that are always localized and embodied. This means that embodiment is constituted by a sense of localization of conscious acts that occur as localizations in my body. Hence, my hand, now resting on the table, is not an object for consciousness. Rather, it is localization where consciousness finds itself as belonging to a primordial *here*, as the place where I build up over time a sense of myself as embodied. If I reduce another to me, to “my sphere”, I obtain material bodies, but if I reduce myself as a man I arrive at my organism and mind or at myself as a psycho-physical unity, and at the me-personality. This is what belongs to me in exclusive manner and it intuitively forms a coherent unity.

It now becomes imperative to demonstrate the reality of other minds. A direct experience of another ego is ruled out because it would then be nothing but a part of my being to me. It is, therefore, held to be necessary to use a kind of mediate intentionality. Although this appears to leave the deep level of the “primordial world”, the latter nevertheless remains fundamental. The new intentionality represents a “co-existence” which can never be present “in person”. The type of experience which meets the need is an act which makes others “co-present”; an act of perception by analogy which Husserl calls “appresentation”. The other body resembles my own and leads me to conceive “by analogy” that it is another organism.

Husserl gives an explication of the sense of “appresentation”. The other’s body is for me a body in the mode *There*. Its manner of appearance does not become paired with the mode of my animate organism in the mode *Here*. It brings to mind the way my body would look “if I were there”. Husserl says,

“...the external body over there receives analogical from mine the sense, animate organism, and consequently the sense, organism belonging to another “world”, analogous to my primordial world.”<sup>34</sup>

It is possible to take the simple determinations of “here” and “there” as corporeal characteristics and to realize through them a distinction between *this body here* and *that body there*, which is ultimately a distinction between two subjects. I can comprehend the other as subject as *having* the experiences I *would* have if I were *there*. This demands that the subject already have had a series of experiences in which the same object is recognized as the same from “here” and “there”.

For Husserl, presentations have their own form of verification, since the experience of the other is not given originally, though the experience of his body is originally given. In the experience of the other, we have an experience that presents itself as genuinely unfulfillable by me, but nevertheless within that something is indicated. The experience of the other is based on a kind of verifiable assertability of what is not originally accessible. As Husserl says:

The character of the existent “other” has its basis in this kind of verifiable accessibility of what is not originally accessible. Whatever can become presented, and evidently verified, originally – is something I am; or else it belongs to me as something peculiarly my own. Whatever, by virtue thereof, in that founded manner which characterizes a primordially unfulfillable experience – an experience that does not give something itself originally but that consistently verifies something indicated – is “other”.<sup>35</sup>

Husserl describes appresentation in several ways. He says that the ego and the alter ego are always given in an original “pairing”. On the basis of these pairing experiences I experience the other as another body like myself. Husserl also speaks of “harmonious behavior”. The experienced animate organism of another continues to present itself as actually an animate organism, solely in its changing but incessantly *harmonious “behavior”*. Every potentially verifiable, further experiences within the horizon are harmoniously synthesized. “The organism becomes experienced as a pseudo-organism, precisely if there is something discordant about its behavior.”<sup>36</sup>

“Indications”, “apperceptions”, interpreted as “pairing” or “appresentation” of harmonious experiences, these are experiences of the other as another body like myself. Husserl always believed that when I perceive other persons, I perceive them in sensuous manner as living animate bodies and realize that their bodies are expressive of their psychic selves. But he did not appear to think that the other self can be grasped immediately and fully. The other body resembles my own and leads me to conceive “by analogy” that it is another organism. A sharp distinction is

drawn between apperceptions which pertain to the primordial sphere and those which appear with the meaning of another ego thus adding new meaning.

We may now summarize the steps in Husserl's analysis of intersubjectivity. They are: (1) My animated body (*Leib*), infallibly perceived as a material object, (2) my self, as the psychological subject of objectifying operations: (3) the body of the other (*Körper*), as an object resembling my body, (4) the transference of subjectivity or conscious experiences to the other body on analogy from my own case. This reflects also a distinction in the mode of constitution of subjectivity in myself and in others. In my own case, constitution of the self comes first, constituted as correlative of all objectivity. With the other subject the process is precisely the reverse – first objectivity, then subjectivity.

Husserl argues that although one's ego is alone absolutely certain, it cannot have experience of the world without being in intercourse with other egos. It must be a member of a "society of monads". The notion of the ego in terms of the Leibnizean notion of the monad already appeared in *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science* [1910-1911] and in *Ideas II*. The "monad" is Husserl's name for the whole concrete conscious life of an ego taken as the full set of all its intentional experiences, both actual and possible. It is the complete blue print of a life as it were.<sup>37</sup> Husserl speaks of monadization of the transcendental ego and of the self as a "monad with windows".

There still remains the constitution of humanity or of the community. When Husserl speaks of the intentional analysis of the community he has in mind the plurality of the acts of the ego which penetrate into other egos by means of experience of appresentation of other egos. Such acts "go from me to you" and are



the social acts which are necessary to establish the possibility of communication between human persons. It must be a member of a “society of monads”. The consciousness of the other as a subject, as sharing a common surrounding world with me is developed in the draft of the *Ideas II* which predates the *Cartesian Meditations*. As Husserl puts it there: “In the comprehensive experience of an other we understand him without further ado as a personal subject and as such in relation to objects to which we are also in relation.”<sup>38</sup>

This has been interpreted as an understanding of intersubjectivity on the basis of a “communicative surrounding world”. This supplements Husserl’s account of intersubjectivity in the *Cartesian Meditations*. This means that I perceive the other person in this sense as relating with me to the same objects and as doing so in a manner which allows for a common understanding of these objects. In other words, I perceive the meaning of the object to be not simply what it means for me, but rather what it means for other persons sharing with me the same surrounding world in which that object appears. It is on this basis that Husserl can go on to speak of the agreement between persons. Such agreement is constituted through the mutual relation of interaction between persons. Such interaction involves directedness towards another in terms which can be understood by that other. Communication is not between discreet subjects but rather subjects of a communicative world, who base their understanding of things on shared, common meanings. Such common or shared meanings would not have been possible in they were founded in my own subjective acts.<sup>39</sup>

From our foregoing discussion of intersubjectivity in Husserl, we may say that classical transcendentalism differs from Husserl’s transcendental subjectivity. Kantian transcendentalism never considered the consciousness of others as a

problem and this can be explained by seeing that it never considered its own activity or its possibility as a philosophical problem. Kant assumed that all knowing subjects take part in the same transcendental consciousness as rational human beings. So the transcendental foundation that he discusses is as much others as it is of his own.

It will perhaps not be out of context to situate the problem of intersubjectivity within the larger problem of alienation. It is a persistent problem in the intellectual concerns in Germany in post-Kantian era. It is clear in Fichte, Schelling and finds extensive articulation in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Marx speaks of "alienated labor". Sartre's writings are also sensitive to the problem of alienation. Ways, too, are shown to avoid this state of alienation, raising the question whether de-alienation is another form of alienation. Husserl's inter-monadic world is constructed on the claim that the ego implies the existence of the other. To doubt the existence of the other is to doubt one's own existence. For Husserl, the other is some sort of a regulative concept, a supplementary category to help us understand the world.

Before we close this chapter we want to draw attention to the enigmatic character of Husserl's concept of transcendental subjectivity. The transcendental Ego is the subject for the world. It is at the same time the being that is object in relation to the world. The very truism of coincidence in man of subjectivity in the form of object in the world and of subjectivity in relation to the world poses for phenomenology a theoretical problem in itself. The question is, are transcendental subjects who function constitutively for the world, men? The reality-status of the mundane I and of the being-status of the transcendental Ego won through the performance of *epoche*, the opposition of the pure Ego and the

empirical ego and that the “essence-wise” and “factual’ definitions are, on the ultimate analysis, to be taken into consideration. This problem is posed by Sundara Rajan in the following way:

...the formation of the personal self, the constitution of my own ego in the sense of natural and worldly self; it is this which is the primary paradox. Husserl tells us that the transcendental ego, as it were, becomes the human ego of worldly mundane experience by means of a certain apperception; elsewhere he says that the transcendental ego takes itself to be a worldly human ego. The indeclinable ‘I’ appears as the ‘I’ of the first person, ‘I-the man’. It is this idea of self-constitution which is the deepest enigma of the Husserlian phenomenology.<sup>40</sup>

### **CHAPTER III**

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