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Intersubjectivity of Ageing

- Reading Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age*

Shinji Hamauzu

1. Opening Words: My background for today's talk¹

I have been engaged with Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity for long time. 20 years ago I published my dissertation just titled "Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity", and 6 years later published the Japanese translation of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, then 3 years ago the first volume of Husserl's *Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity* (Husserliana Vol.13 to 15), 2 years ago the second. And the third volume would be published soon in this October.

I have been also engaged with the problem of caring in a wide sense including stages of birth, ageing, disease and death. These four phenomena just mentioned are called the "four sufferings" by Buddha. However my interest doesn't lie in the Buddhism, but in the contemporary situation around these phenomena which are totally changed especially after the World War II, partly because of the so-called medicalization. About this theme I'm giving lectures at the university, as well as organizing symposia outside the university with citizens.

For a couple of years I have been trying to build a bridge between both of my interests, phenomenology of intersubjectivity and caring in the contemporary society. Two years ago I read a paper titled "Caring and Phenomenology from the Husserlian point of view of Intersubjectivity" at an international conference organized by Husserl-Archive in Cologne, Germany.

Now I come to Finland. I met Prof. Sara Heinämaa at first at the conference of the Phenomenological Association of Japan in 2007 when she gave an impressive talk about Husserl's ethics in Kaizo article. In 2009 I took part in the conference of Nordic Society for Phenomenology in Tampere and read my paper "Narrative and

Perspective”. In 2010, I was an examiner for a doctoral thesis by a Japanese female researcher titled “Freedom and Acknowledgement – Ethical thoughts of Simone de Beauvoir” in which the author emphasized the influence of Edmund Husserl in Beauvoir’s early writings. Related to it I read Heinämaa’s excellent work *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference – Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir*. When I stayed in Helsinki for a week two years ago and had a chance to discuss my interests mentioned above with her, I found we have a common interest in many points and would like to make a collaboration with her.

In this March she stayed in Osaka and gave a lecture and a seminar in Osaka University. I was very impressed with her lecture titled “Ageing and Death: A phenomenological-Philosophical Approach” based on her paper “Transformations of Old Age - Selfhood, Normativity, and Time” on Beauvoir’s book *The Coming of Age*. In this summer semester, from April to July, I gave a lecture on Old Age in which I talked about ageing from various perspectives just in a similar way as Beauvoir developed in her book and by quoting her book at some important points. Simultaneously in a seminar of the same period I read Husserl’s text, *Husserliana* vol.42, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, namely *Problem on Limits of Phenomenology*. Now I would like to begin with Beauvoir’s work and go further to Husserl’s work.

2. The first part “Old age seen from without” of Beauvoir’s work *The Coming of Age*

Her work is composed of two parts: the first part “Old age seen from without (outside)” and the second part “The being-in-the-world”, in other words old age seen from inside. We can consider the first part as empirical studies based on empirical sciences such as biology, ethnology, history and sociology, whereas we can consider the second part as philosophical studies with existential or phenomenological tendency, based on description from first person perspective, by quoting literature and autobiography by various authors. In “Preface” of the

book she declared her idea of such composition and called it “interdependency” of both perspectives from outside and inside or “a principle of circularity” between exteriority and interiority. In order to philosophize on ageing according to her idea we need such a “total perspective” which I find very appropriate. I would like to begin my reading with her empirical studies in the first part, but soon I notice that such empirical studies are partly out of date, because this book was written in 1970, namely 45 years ago. We must therefore update some information of this part.

2-1. The first chapter “The old age and biology”

In my lecture I’ve updated some important points of knowledge from biology, medicine and gerontology, for instance that activated oxygen wounds DNA of our body, that cell division is limited because of telomere, that multicellular organism with sexual reproduction is composed of somatic cells and germ cells, that telomere limits the life of somatic cells, whereas telomerase resets the life of germ cells, and that this makes a biological programme of ageing and death of human being. Beauvoir quoted Dr. Escoffier-Lambiotte, “that ageing and subsequent death... occur when a set programme of growth and ripening reaches its end”(25).² This programme which makes ageing and death “the law of life” has been almost proved by modern molecular biology of DNA.

Nevertheless Beauvoir’s opinions about biological gerontology are not out of date. She wrote: Gerontology’s “conclusions are of the very highest interest, and old age cannot possibly be understood without reference to them. But they cannot tell the whole story. ... A man’s ageing and his decline always takes place inside some given society”(36). “What so complicates the whole problem is the close interdependence of all these points”(9), such as a biological phenomenon, psychological consequences and an existential dimension, or in other words: “I shall look upon it as a complete entity, tying it in with the biological, existential and social context, accordingly to the principle of circularity”(33).

2-2. The second chapter “The ethnological Data”

Also to her historical investigations I've added some points about Japanese history, because Beauvoir didn't mention any historical considerations to Japanese history of ageing without exception of mentioning the Ainu, indigenous people in northern island of Japan before influenced by Japanese civilization, and old customs to abandon the old described by Japanese Novel “Narayama”, mountains of death, by Shichiro Fukazawa. Beauvoir wrote: “Many societies respect the old so long as they are clear-minded and robust, but get rid of them when they become senile and infirm”(51). However, it isn't clear whether Fukazawa's Novel describes a real event, because it is presented as a fiction, and is based on a legend. Generally speaking, she wrote, “we may infer that the most usual choice of communities with inadequate resources, ... is to sacrifice the old. ... When a society has a certain margin of security, there seems on the face of it to be a reasonable supposition that it will maintain its aged people”(81). In such a society “the aged men and women are in close relationship with the children. ... The old person, being freed from the labour of the adults, has time to look after the young; and in their turn they have the leisure to provide their grandparents with the services they need”(84f.). She called it an “exchange of kindness”(ibid.), where we can find an origin of taking care of the elderly.

2-3. The third chapter “Old age in historical societies”

At the beginning of the third chapter Beauvoir wrote: “It is impossible to write a history of old age”(88). In 1987, 17 years later after her book, a French historian Georges Minois published “*Histoire de la vieillesse en occident: de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance (History of the old age in the Western countries: from the ancient to Renaissance)*”. Although Beauvoir's historical study is limited to Western societies with only one exception China, very shortly, and also to mainly literature and writings by novelist, philosophers and politicians, not any historical documents, it covers up to 20th century and the next chapter “Old age in present-day society” follows it. In this sense Beauvoir's historical study is much wider than

Minois' historical work.

In my lecture I introduced some Japanese books on a history of old age in Japan written by some Japanese historians. "In the twentieth century", Beauvoir writes, "the urbanization of society continued, and one of its consequences was the disappearance of the patriarchal family"(208). In Japan there was a restoration of *Tenno* (emperor) system after collapse of the *shogunate* (feudalistic government by *shogun*) in the second half of 19th century. In this system the patriarchal family was very strong. Although at last at the end of Second World War II, 1945, the system with the patriarchal family was abandoned, it remains underground in various customs of Japanese postwar society. In such situation the caring for children as well as the elderly in family was forced to women, housewives in Japan. This situation is now slowly changing.

Beauvoir wrote, "Taken as whole, the advance of industrialization has led to a progressive dissolution of the family unit. The marked ageing of the population that has been observed these last years in the industrial countries has forced the community to take the place of the family. Society has adopted a policy with regard to old age"(209). Just in 2000, 30 years later than Beauvoir's book, Japan has introduced a system of socialization of caring in place of the family after the problem of ageing of population has been begun to be discussed widely.

2-4. The fourth Chapter "Old age in present-day society"

In the fourth chapter Beauvoir quoted Sauvy's words "The least debatable of all the phenomena of our day, the surest in its progress, the easiest to foresee far ahead and perhaps the most pregnant with consequences is the ageing of the population"(221), and wrote about the situation of France in those days: "In October 1969 there were 6.3 million persons aged over sixty-five in France, or more than twelve per cent of the population"(221). In Japan of same year the ratio of ageing of the population was about 7 per cent, but became over 14 per cent in 1995 and more than 25 per cent last year, namely 31.9 million persons aged over sixty-five, one fourth of population. Japan's ratio of ageing of population lies now on the top

of the world and Japan is so to speak a super-aged society which any country has never experienced. From there it can happen what Beauvoir never imagined in those days of France.

Beauvoir wrote. “In the capitalist democracies, the ageing of the population has raised new difficulties. ... Old age has become the object of a policy”(222). After she mentioned “pensions”, “a system of social insurance” by Bismarck in Germany, she wrote, “Of the capitalist countries, there are three that look upon it as an imperative duty to ensure decent conditions for all citizens; there are Denmark, Norway and Sweden”(225). Nowadays we could add Finland to such so-called social welfare countries. From such background I’m also interested in the social caring system for the elderly in Finland in which I can’t unfortunately enter today. In any case it is worthy to reconsider the problem of ageing beyond Beauvoir’s book *The Coming of Age* from this side.

3. The second part “Being-in-the-world”

As I’ve pointed at the beginning, Beauvoir in the first part “looked at the aged man as an object, an object from the scientific, historic and social point of view: we have described him from the outside”, whereas she in the second part will describe him “who is also subject and has an intimate, inward knowledge of his state and who reacts it”(279). We remember the idea of “interdependency” or “the principle of circularity” I pointed out already. Beauvoir denied it to be a “dilemma” and introduced another idea about it as follows: “it is a dialectic relationship between my being as he (the outsider) defines it objectively and the awareness of myself that I acquire by means of him”(284). But on the other hand she called it “contradiction” too, as follows: “We must assume a reality that is certainly ourselves although it reaches us from the outside and although we cannot grasp it. There is an insoluble contradiction between the obvious clarity of the inward feeling that guarantees our unchanging quality and the objective certainty of our transformation. All we can do is to waver from the one to the other, never managing to hold them both firmly

together”(290). But this idea of “an insoluble contradiction” is in my opinion against the idea of “a dialectic relationship”.

In this context Beauvoir mentioned Sartre’s term: “old age belongs to that category which Sartre calls the unrealizable”(291). According to Sartre’s idea, “It is impossible for us to experience what we are for others in the for-itself mode: the unrealizable is ‘my being seen from without which bounds all my choices and which constitutes their reverse aspect’”(291). She wrote also: “Old age is something beyond my life, outside it - something of which I cannot have any full inward experience. But when she introduced Sartre’s term “the unrealizable” and distinguished between the realizable and the unrealizable, this idea seems me to be again against the idea of “a dialectic relationship” and also against the idea of “interdependency” and “the principle of circularity”.

In relation to Sartre’s term “the unrealizable”, I would like to comment and to introduce an often misunderstood idea of “empathy” for experience of the other (Fremderfahrung) which he characterized “accessibility of original unaccessibility” (CM, 117)³. In other words, by criticizing Leibnitz’s thought “Monad has no window”, Husserl insisted: Monad has “reell” (Husserl used a French word in distinction from a German word “real”) no window, but has “intentional” a window which is called “empathy”. According to Husserl’s term, we can say, what is “reell” “unrealizable” could be “intentional” “realizable”. But back to Beauvoir’s book.

3-1. The sixth chapter “Time, activity, history”

The same inconsistency happened not only with the problem of old age, but also with the problem of death in the sixth chapter. She wrote: “Death belongs to that category in which we have placed old age and which Sartre calls the ‘unrealizables’; the for-itself can neither reach death nor project itself towards it; death is the external limit of my possibilities and not a possibility of my own”(441). Also here she was caught in a trap of Sartrean dualism of “being-for-itself” and “being-for-other” instead of a “dialectic relationship” between them.

It turns out also with the title of the second part “Being-in-the-world”.

This term originated as you know from Heidegger's work *Being and Time*. It was translated to "Being-in-the-world (Être-dans-le-monde)" by Sartre, whereas Merleau-Ponty translated it to "Being-to-the-world (Être-au-monde)", because human being in the world is totally different from things in the world. The central idea for it lies in the idea of "living body" or "lived body" which he learned by Husserl's idea of "Leib" or "mein Leib" different from "Körper". This idea which Merleau-Ponty laid in the center of his book *Phenomenology of Perception*, lacks in Beauvoir's discussion of "body's experience" in the fifth chapter, i.e. the first chapter of the second part, titled "The discovery and assumption of old age: the body's experience", in my opinion. Therefore at the sole passage, where this term appeared, she could write: "Death has one element that runs throughout all history: by destroying our organism it wholly does away with our being in the world"(440). In this passage it seems me that she reduced "being in the world" to the sole "organism", but not the "ambiguous" being of "my living body" which Merleau-Ponty characterized as an object and a subject simultaneously.

3-2. The seventh chapter "Old age and everyday life"

From the beginning Beauvoir distinguished between ageing and death, by saying: "Disease is contingent, whereas ageing is the law of life itself"(28). Nevertheless ageing, disease and death are intertwined with each other especially in the super-aged society as Japan. The cause of death in a year is ranked in Japan, cancer on the top, heart attack on the second, pneumonia on the third and brain attack at the fourth place. And the ratio of old age among dying people is very high. In caring for the elderly the important problem lies in paralyzed patients after brain attack as well as in patients with dementia. Just here we find a point of contact between ageing and disease. Nowadays in Japan the elderly with dementia is estimated to amount 4.6 million, 15 per cent of the elderly. And if we count "Mild cognitive impairment" as a beginning step to dementia, it is estimated to amount 4 million, and if we count this MCI together with dementia, it is estimated to be totally 8.6 million, one among four aged persons. The problem of dementia is now a

crucial one in Japan.

I find it interesting and pioneering that Beauvoir described the problem of mental disorders with old age by quoting some works by psychiatrists such as Henry Ey, Freud, Minkowski and Kraepelin. She wrote: “Mental illnesses are more frequent among the old than among any other age-group. Yet they were very poorly understood until the end of the 19th century: they were all grouped under the single heading of senile dementia. ... Yet since old age is a ‘normal abnormality’ it is still often difficult to draw the line between the mental disturbances that ordinarily accompany ageing and those which are of a pathological nature”(493). Further she reported the situation in those days: “It (senile dementia) has become more frequent in recent years because the number of old people has increased. ... It has assumed a considerable social importance, and because of the destruction of the family-unit and the consequent need to look after the patients in hospital, it arouses difficult problems. Living conditions have great influence upon the appearance and evolution of the disease”(499f.).

At the end of this chapter she quoted Dr Repond’s words: “it is reasonable to wonder whether the old concept of senile dementia, the alleged result of cerebral disorders, should not be entirely overhauled, and whether these pseudo-dementias are not the result of psycho-sociological factors ... We even go to far as to claim that the clinical picture of senile dementia may be an artifact, due in the majority of cases to shortcomings in the treatment and in the attempts at prevention and rehabilitation”(503f.). I find this idea very important especially for the present-day situation of Japan, but unfortunately she didn’t develop this idea much more in this book.

4. Quotation from Husserl

Before ending my reading of Beauvoir’s book, I would like to comment to Prof. Heināmaa’s article and lecture which I mentioned above. Her interest is concentrated on philosophical investigations which Beauvoir described mainly in

the second part of her book. At the prologue of her lecture and original paper Prof. Heinämaa quoted the following passages: “Also I myself will die—like I was once born, developed into adulthood and got old. But the question is, what this means”. And she began her comment as follows: “This statement could well be from Simone de Beauvoir’s late work, *The Coming of Age*, but it could equally well belong to Sartre’s or Merleau-Ponty’s reflections on the temporality of the human condition. It comes, however, from a more distant source which is less familiar to contemporary feminist theorists and philosophers of life: the quote is from Husserl’s reflections on the finiteness of human existence”. Certainly the statement originates from Husserl’s manuscript titled “The anthropological World” written at the end of 1936, contained in *Husserliana* vol.29.

However I must add a comment to her comment on the quotation. The statement was quoted from the manuscript mentioned above and from a paragraph titled “living in the world and dying of human and transcendental subjectivity”. The statement quoted from almost the middle of this paragraph is related to living and dying of human subjectivity. But Husserl concluded at the end of this paragraph and also of this manuscript as follows: “The human being cannot be immortal. The man dies inevitably. The human being doesn’t have any worldly pre-existence. In the temporal-spatial world he didn’t have anything before and won’t be anything later. But the transcendental original life, the ultimate world-creating life and it’s ultimate I cannot be generated from nothing and go away into nothing. It is ‘immortal’, because death for it has nonsense”(XXIX, 338).⁴ Husserl distinguished here the mortality of human subjectivity and the immortality of transcendental subjectivity.

5. From Cartesian Egology to Leibnizean Monadology in Husserl’s Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity

Also in texts of *Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity* which I translated into Japanese we can find the same distinction at least at the beginning of his considerations where he started with Cartesian egology. For instance in a

manuscript written in 1922 from *Husserliana* vol.14, Husserl wrote: “The I neither arise, nor vanish, but experiences something always. The pure I which the phenomenological reduction gives us is ‘eternal’ and immortal in one sense. ... On the contrary it is only human being as a member of nature that can be born and die in the natural sense”(XIV, 157). Yet in the context of Leibnitzian monadology, by proceeding from static phenomenology to genetic phenomenology, the question of genesis in the concrete status calls the issues of beginning and ending, interruption, transformation and ripeness into considerations. In a manuscript written at the beginning of 1930s from *Husserliana* vol.15, he raised issues of “unconsciousness, sedimental ground of consciousness, sleep without dream, state of birth of subjectivity, or being before birth, death and being after death”(XV, 608), and asked: “How far does such a reconstruction reach concerning birth and death?”(XV, 609). We can interpret this “reconstruction” as “constructive phenomenology” which Eugen Fink characterized in his *VI. Cartesian Mediation*(1988). In a manuscript written in 1930s Husserl wrote: “Death is unrepresentable (or in Sartrean term, unrealizable) in the self-considerations (i.e. egological considerations). ... Death gets meaning for me only on the way through understanding of others”(XV, 452). In the solipsistic static phenomenology birth and death cannot have meaning without being on limits of phenomenology, whereas both get meaning in the genetic and further constructive phenomenology regarding the experience of others and even in the transcendental dimension.

We can find a similar thinking in *Problem on Limits of Phenomenology*, *Husserliana* vol. 42 which was published last year and with which I worked in my seminar of this summer semester as written. The problems which Husserl called “the problem of birth and death, transcendental constitution of meaning which both have as events in the world, and the problem of sex “ in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (VI, 192) are just discussed in this volume 42. At the beginning he considered birth and death as events in the constituted world, whereas the constituting subjectivity has neither birth nor death. But when he began to talk about “transcendental life” instead of transcendental subjectivity, he

brought birth and death into consideration on the transcendental dimension and began to talk on co-existence on the transcendental dimension, too. In the concrete status of monad limited between birth and death, it gets meaning to take “birth, development of childhood, ripening, ageing and death” of “human being as fellows” into consideration. In this context Husserl discussed on “transcendental other” which “coexists transcendently with my transcendental I”(XV, 372). In this context he wrote: “I am through that I am for me and included in the constitution of universe of transcendental co-I (Mit-Ich). I cannot be who I am without that the other being for me isn’t without me. The transcendental inclusion is necessity of transcendental co-existence (XV, 370). Unfortunately I have no enough time to talk about the latest stage of Husserl’s *Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity*, but give only a short comment.

Here we find an intertwining relationship between the constituted world where we live or dwell in the natural attitude and the constituting subjectivity or transcendental life which we can find through the transcendental reduction, in other words, an interdependent relationship between phenomenological psychology and transcendental phenomenology which is discussed in the lecture *Phenomenological Psychology* in 1925 (Husserliana IX), or the similar relationship between “ontology of life-world” and transcendental phenomenology which is discussed in the latest publication *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* in 1936 (Husserliana VI). In my opinion, the “interdependency” or “the principle of circularity” at the beginning of Beauvoir’s book *The Coming of Age* which I emphasized at the beginning of my talk is sympathizing with such a tendency of the latest Husserl.

6. Closing words: Caring for the elderly

In “Conclusion” of her book, Beauvoir wrote: “if we wish the old person’s state to be acceptable”, “it is the whole man that must be re-made, it is the whole relationship between man and man that must be recast. ... A man should not start

his last years alone and emptyhanded”(543). And further: “If he were not atomized from his childhood, shut away and isolated among other atoms, and if he shed in a collective life, ... then he would never experience banishment. Nowhere, and in no country, have these conditions obtained. Although the socialist countries may have come a little closer to them than the capitalist, they still have a very long way to go”(ibid.). From a similar thinking I’m very interested in Nordic countries with welfare and caring system. It is also the reason why I am interested in Finland.

Notes

- 1 This paper was read on 18. September 2015 at the seminar for philosophy of the University of Helsinki, Finland, organized Prof. Sara Heinämaa, to whom I am deeply grateful. She gave a lecture titled “Transformations of Old Age: Selfhood, Normativity, and Time” on 25 March 2015 at Toyonaka Campus of Osaka University, in which she discussed about Beauvoir’s book *The Coming of Age* and the Japanese translation of which is published in this number of our journal *Clinical Philosophy*. I wrote this paper as a reply to her lecture.
- 2 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Coming of Age*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996.
- 3 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Felix Meiner Verlag, 1977.
- 4 References to any volume of *Husserliana* will be noted with the volume in Roman numbers and pages in Arabic numbers.