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To live together with others – from Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity¹

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Abstract:

At the turning point of 19th century to 20th century, from the modern period to the contemporary period, the first philosopher who regarded “others” as one of the fundamental problems of philosophy and wrestled with it for the first time in the history of European philosophy was the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl. However he didn't remain concerned the problem of “other minds”, such as the question “How can I get knowledge about other minds?”, but grasped the problem of “others” in wider sense and stated it as the “fundamental problem of phenomenology”. He tried to discuss his investigation on “others” as problematics of “intersubjectivity” since his early period. They are on the one hand a inquiry into the relationship “between subject and subject”, but on the other a problem of the relationship “between subject and object”, namely a thought that the world in itself is no object apart from the subject, but is constituted “intersubjectively”. Husserl investigated the theory of “others” just in such a context. His problematics of “intersubjectivity” were connected to traditional and contemporary philosophers. They are also intertwined with most of problems he investigated in various ways: through the contrast between ontology and phenomenology, we notice that they come into the structure of “phenomenon” and are related to one of fundamental concepts of phenomenology, i.e. the term “intentionality”. The very idea of “intentionality” broke the dualistic scheme of “subject and object” that was presupposed in the modern philosophy, and gave birth to the idea of “between”. Thus, we can say that the idea of “intentionality” prepared the phenomenology of “intersubjectivity” as the “fundamental problems of phenomenology”. This is just the clue to solve

why almost every problem Husserl investigated is connected to problematics of “intersubjectivity”.

1. Introduction

In the U.S. the presidential candidate Mr. Donald John Trump insists that a huge wall against Hispanics from Mexico should be built and the frontier should be guarded against Islamic refugees from the Middle and Near East, with the motto “America, First!”. He is supported by those who hope to prevent foreigners and others minority to groups from living in America. Also, a referendum in the U.K. was held in June of this year, and British citizens voted in favor of the U.K. to leave the European Union, an event commonly referred to as “Brexit”. One of reasons why people voted for “Brexit” was an antipathy against a growing numbers of Islamic refugees and migration to Britain in general. After the vote, attacks on non-British people were reported in the media. Similar tendencies are to be found in other European countries including Germany and France. It seems me that people in the western world are losing sight of how we can live together with others, and especially “foreign others”. When I began to research Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity in the 1990's, about 28 years ago, I had a similar impression when I was confronted with the situation after the fall of Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union as well as other East European socialistic countries, a concern worse by splitting of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.

2. Husserl as founder of philosophy on others

At the turning point of 19th century to 20th century, from the modern period to the contemporary period, the first philosopher who regarded “others” as one of the fundamental problems of philosophy and wrestled with it for the first time in the history of European philosophy was the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl. It is not accidental that many philosophers who were respectively

influenced by him and took over the spirit of phenomenology differently, e.g. Heidegger, Levinas, Schutz, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, even if they used the term “phenomenology” or not, they engaged with the problem of “others” more or less in their own ways, offering different perspectives. Because in so far as they turn their eyes towards the idea of “phenomenon”, they cannot help ask “for whom” it appears and ask about the difference or the sameness between the “phenomenon” appearing “for me” and appearing “for the other”. In this sense, phenomenology cannot help but include the problem of the “other” as one of its essential concerns from the beginning. This is just the key of solving the following enigma: Why the philosophers who were influenced by Husserl, despite taking different directions, nonetheless kept the problem of “others” as central to their work.

Another interesting point was that those philosophers took over the problem of “others” from Husserl, but developed their own theory of “others” by criticizing Husserl's theory of “others” from their own points of view respectively. Although they took over Husserl's spirit regarding it as a fundamental problem of philosophy, all who engaged with Husserl's ideas were not satisfied with his theory of “others”. However, Husserl himself was not entirely satisfied with the theory he himself developed, and this is evidenced by the following example.

The fifth meditation of *Cartesian Meditations* written based on the speeches in Paris and Strasbourg 1928 of his later years is well known as Husserl's theory of “others”. This work was first published 1931 in a French translation (partly worked on by the young Levinas) . What he added to the manuscript of speech with almost the same amount as the original one at the publication was the fifth meditation in question. *Cartesian Meditations* was almost a patchwork of manuscripts that was gathered quickly from notes he had written until then, and was by no means a systematically controlled work. Although Husserl afterwards intended to revise it to a precise German version, he had other plans for publication in those days. The plan of revision was not realized in his life, and the original German version *Cartesianische Meditationen* was published in 1950 as the first volume of the *Husserliana*, the complete works of Husserl, based on the efforts of the Husserl

Archive later.

The theory of “others” in the fifth meditation of the *Cartesianian Meditations* is nothing but the tip of an iceberg, works that he saved through his wrestling with the problem, and there remain lengthy manuscripts several times more than the published one about the problem of “others”. They were published as *Towards Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity*, the 13th to the 15th volume of *Husserliana* 1973. They are composed of massive drafts that began in 1905 when he had just thought of the “phenomenological reduction” and continued for 30 years to 1935 just before his death. They covered almost all periods when he faced philosophy and were entwined with every problem he coped with. Although there are some manuscripts for his lectures among them, most are “working manuscripts” and were not offered for publication. They were not expression of a finished thought, but a document of his thinking processes in a “state of being born”, in his unique style of writing by thinking with the stenography called “Garbersberger”. What must be emphasized here is that almost all of this work by Husserl in these three volumes are remained unknown to the philosophers I mentioned above, and so many of Husserl's philosophical successors were simply unaware of the ideas contained within these volumes. Those who attempt to wrestle with Husserl's theory of “others” must not get along not only with *Cartesian Meditations*, but work with the three volumes of *Towards Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity*.

3. Problematics of “Intersubjectivity”

Problematics of “Intersubjectivity”, Husserl named as a title of all the problems of “others”, are on the one hand a inquiry into the relationship “between subject and subject”, but on the other a problem of the relationship “between subject and object”, namely a thought that the world in itself is no object apart from the subject, but is constituted “intersubjectively”. Husserl investigated the theory of “others” just in such a context. This characterizes Husserl's theory of “others” and it is decisive because it is not impossible to understand it without this context. What

does it mean?

What is the nature of “others”? Normally I don't call my family members like my wife, children, parents, siblings “others”. But in the sense of “physically separated” we can call even the most intimate family members, everybody except myself, “others”. Moreover there is another usage of this term according to which we call “other” or “different” or “foreign” people “others”. For instance women are “others” for men, children are “others” for adults, elderly are “others” for minors, foreigners are “others” for nationals, and vice versa. To widen the example, students are “others” for teachers, patients are “others” for doctors, cared for persons are “others” for caregivers, disabled persons are “others” for persons without disabilities, and vice versa. In this sense, men or women are not “others” for each other, adults or children are not “others” for each other. We don't draw a line between “I” and “others”, but between “we” as a group in various senses and “others” as a different group. Also, the concept of “others” doesn't presuppose that “others” are human beings. After all, all animals are “others” for humans, if we take animals as subjects, humans are “others” e.g. for a wild bear, dogs are “others” for monkeys.

If we return to human beings, in everyday life, we make contact with “others”. When we greet them unintentionally, talk about work or study, go together somewhere and do something together, we know they are “others”, but never think about them as “others”. There is no space for using the term “others” in everyday life. But once something happens that changes the situation, the “other” to whom I have some kind of relation, changes suddenly to the foreign, estranged and unfamiliar - “other”, a person who is thinking something I don't understand. Suddenly, persons around me become foreigners for me or I myself become a foreigner for them. They appear suddenly as “others”. Imagine e.g. when I fall in depression, into dementia or when I'm informed that I do not have long to live because of cancer. The term “others” comes to be used in everyday life suddenly, and in the introduction of “others” disrupts our way of thinking and acting in the world. Thus we can say, against “others” as the fact of affairs the term “others” brings an unusual thing which we didn't have in our daily life. Here I would like to call problems emerging from

usual “others” to unusual “others” as the theory of “others”.

If we look back over history of philosophy, the European modern philosophy which René Descartes opened with the thought “*Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am)” was fundamentally a philosophy which intended to make “I” or “subject” the starting point, where the theory of “others” was not considered as a philosophical problem. Descartes thought “Good sense (Reason) is given to everybody innately”, “The certainty of *sum*(I am)” is applied to everybody who can “think”. He never imagined that “you think” or “he or she thinks” is not certain, but doubtful, whereas “I think” is certain and undoubted. What we can say about “me” we can say about “everybody” as well. He overlooked the difference between “I” and “everybody”.

The English empiricist John Locke thought differently. He denied “innate ideas” which according to Descartes are innate commonly to everyone and thought that human beings are born in the state of “*tabula rasa* (white paper)” and get every cognition from “experience”. Different persons get different ideas through different experiences. The English empiricism school took for the first time the difference between “I and others” seriously and brought it into question. According to Locke “I” can't see “ideas in the mind” of “others” and only can reason them by analogy through words and bodies as outer “signs of ideas”. By succeeding to Lock's idea of “other minds” David Hume intended to consider “sympathy” as a way to “other minds” in “human nature”. Although J. S. Mill in 19th century tried to explain it with “reason by analogy”, the German translator of Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Theodor Lipps criticized Mill's discussion and developed “empathy (Einfühlung)” as fundament of aesthetics and ethics. In this way, the question “How can I get knowledge about other minds” was discussed in the tradition of the English empiricism since Locke and further by other thinkers in the contemporary philosophy. Ludwig Wittgenstein's discussions from his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*Logical-philosophical Treatise*) to his *Philosophical Investigations* on “other minds” stayed in the same tradition. We might expand that thought further, “the theory of mind” discussed in the contemporary primatology or the

developmental psychological study of autism offers an expansion of thought along similar lines. Recently, through the discovery of “mirror neuron” people have begun to discuss the theory of “empathy” in the connection with neuro-science, I mention it only in passing here.

4. How did Husserl’s discussion on “others” come about?

How did Husserl develop an interest in the question of “others”? In the first investigation titled “Expression and meaning” of his breakthrough work *Logical Investigations* vol.2 (1901), when he mentioned “expression in the communicative function” in contrast to “expression in the solitary mental life”, he mentioned the question of “others” for the first time. He said that communicating with words only becomes possible by “the listener’s understanding the speaker’s intention” and “the listener’s grasping the speaker as a person who doesn’t produce only sounds but is talking to oneself” . Thus he said, “speaking and listening, i.e. the speaker’s letting the mental experiences know and listener’s receiving them are related to each other. Therefore the “expression in the communicative function” works as “sign for speaker’s thoughts” and he called it “function of letting know”. The listener’s understanding of speaker’s letting know is neither a conceptual knowing nor reasonable judging, but it means “listener’s intuitionally grasping speaker as a person expressing so and so”. Then Husserl said, “In the ordinary usage we apply the word ‘perception’ to the mental experience of other persons and we say that we ‘see’ his or her anger or pain. Such a usage is totally right.” He continued, “The listener perceives the speaker’s expressing his or her mental experiences, and in this sense the listener perceives the speaker’s experience. But the listener doesn’t experience it by him- or herself, doesn’t have any ‘inner’ experience but only an ‘outer’ experience”. He proceeded to say that a “mutual understanding” is realized, “it demands a mutual relationship developed in both sides of letting know and getting it, but no complete equality”. But his interest concerned the following issue; that “also in the mental life without transmitting in communication, the expression has

an important role”, that “even the expression in the solitary mental life expresses something and has the same meaning as in conversation”, and entered into the meaning function which works in both scenes. Thus he continued his discussion by leaving the question concerning how we get know about other's experience aside. In *Logical Investigations* he never returned back to the problem of “others”.

The stimulus from the above mentioned Lipps' theory of “empathy” seems to have triggered him to consider the problem of “others”. The publication of *Logical Investigations* inspired many scholars; one of them was the group of scholars around Lipps in Munich University. They visited Husserl in Göttingen often (later called Munich's phenomenological school). Probably in such an exchange Husserl was interested in Lipps' works and theory of “empathy”. Max Scheler was in those days among this group, and later joined Husserl's circle in Göttingen, and cooperated with the editing of *The Yearbook of Philosophy and Phenomenological Studies* with Husserl. Scheler published his maiden work *Towards Phenomenology and Theory of Sympathy and of Love and Hate* (1913) and discussed the theory of empathy critically, which was a common interest with Husserl. It was no coincidence that at the same period Edith Stein, Husserl's first assistant, wrote her dissertation titled *Problems of Empathy* (1917).

But Lipps' theory cannot be identified simply with the above mentioned theory of “other minds”. Since the latter asks the question “How can I get knowledge of other minds?”, the problem of “other mind” is examined within the intellectual inquiry of “getting knowledge” and Mill's theory of “reasoning by analogy” is presented as part of the same discussion. From critics against such theory, Lipps intended to state that the theory of “empathy” was not an intellectual theory, as it had an emotional or instinctive dimension. If we may say more, Husserl, by criticizing Lipps' theory of empathy, tried to consider it before “other minds” and just as grasping “other body” as “living body (Leib)”. This was a trigger to let Husserl think again about the mind-body relationship, just as Scheler criticized Mill and Lipps with the “undifferentiated experience of mind-body” and lead him later to the idea of “pairing (Paarung)” of my lived body and other lived body, which we can

find in *Cartesian Meditations*.

However, I must now explain why I said at the beginning that Husserl wrestled with the problem of “others” as a fundamental problem of philosophy for the first time. I mean that whilst Husserl didn't remain concerned with the problem of “other minds” throughout all his writings, he wrote on other philosophical issues, he nonetheless clearly and demonstrably grasped the problem of “others” in wider sense and stated it as the “fundamental problem of phenomenology”. Considering “others” as a fundamental problem of philosophy doesn't mean anything different from stating it within the context of phenomenology of intersubjectivity. He tried to discuss his investigations on “others” as problematics of intersubjectivity since his early period.

5. What is the “intersubjectivity” ?

We may say, “intersubjectivity” is concerned with the relationship “between subject and subject”. To offer a metaphor, imagine we were observing two “subjects” at the same distance from outside, or if we may borrow Merleau-Ponty's expression “observing from a bird's-eye view by flying in the sky”. However, one of two subjects should be just “I myself” and if I think by entering the one, “another subject” is called “the other”. Then the “between subject and subject” is called “between me and the other”, and the problem of “intersubjectivity” turns up as the problem of “others”, or differently expressed, we can say, the problem of “others” turns up as one side of the problem of “intersubjectivity”, although the problem doesn't however end here.

Through the modern philosophy the term “object” was used as an antonym of “subject”. Also usually we hear often the confrontation between “subjective” and “objective”, such as in the usage, “His explanation is too subjective” or “Her explanation is objective and reliable”. “Subjective” means biased to one's own opinions or points of view and not taking other's opinion into consideration, thus self-satisfied. In contrast to it, “objective” means not biased to any specified opinions

or points of view, not contaminated by them, and seeing the things “as it were”. Therefore “objects” are assumed to be independent from “subject” and beings (reality) in themselves, independent from whether they become to be known by “subjects” or not. For instance the Andromeda Galaxy apart from Earth in approximately 780 kiloparsecs at the velocity of light existed in itself since far earlier times than it was discovered by humans. It is assumed to be an existing “object” independent from human “subjects”.

Immanuel Kant, however, called such “objects” that are assumed to exist “in themselves”, to be “things in themselves” and thought that they are unknowable and that they can come into existence in the relationship with “subjects” in so far as they are recognized and become “appearances”. As far as we can say so, the recognition can come into effect only in the frameworks of “subjects” (i.e. time and space in the sensitivity and forms of category in the understanding) which Kant called “transcendental”. Such frameworks are “what precedes experience and makes it possible”. Kant thought that such “transcendental” functions are innate in “subjects”, subjects that are not empirical or individual “subjects”, but so to speak are “trans-individual subjects”.

Although Husserl grasped the fundamental idea of phenomenology in his *Logical Investigations*, he thought that it is hidden by the view of world which is taken for granted in the everyday life (which he called “natural attitude”) and that the method of “phenomenological reduction” (“taking it in parenthesis” or “shutting down” or in Greek word “epoché”) is necessary in order to get the phenomenological view. Around the year of publishing *Logical Investigations* Husserl visited Ernst Mach who had used the term “phenomenology” already. Probably recommended by him Husserl read Richard Avenarius' *Human Concept of World*. In Husserl's manuscript for his lecture “Fundamental Problems of Phenomenology” in the first volume of *Towards Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity* he discussed the “natural attitude” in context with Avenarius' “natural concept of world” and began to talk about the idea of “phenomenological reduction”. This idea began to grow up for the first time during his stay in Seefeld in Tirol in the summer of 1905. While he

had an interest in Kant in the background, Pfänder and Daubert, both disciples of Lipps, had accompanied his stay. We can presume that the awaking of the idea of reduction and the commitment with Lipps' theory of empathy introduced by both scholars were progressing at the same time. In order to develop his idea of “phenomenological reduction” Husserl learned Descartes' “methodological skepsis” as a method for getting a view of the new world of phenomenology, but tried to interpret it as a way leading to the dimension of Kant's “transcendental” problematics. But Husserl thought, if he regarded the “subject” as functioning in this “transcendental” dimension as a human being within the world, he fell into a paradoxical situation that what is only a part of the world holds the whole world (he called it “paradox of subjectivity”). Just in order to solve the paradox he stepped into the direction regarding the “transcendental subjectivity” as “intersubjectivity”. It was the reason why the idea of “reduction” and the interest in “intersubjectivity” developed almost simultaneously.

It is also interesting that Husserl in *Cartesian Meditations* of his late period introduced the term “monad” from Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, rephrased “intersubjective” with “intermonadic”, and that his interest in this term began very early, almost in the same period of his interest in the problem of intersubjectivity. It means, although the problem of “I and others” can be easily connected with Cartesian Egology, he thought about it in the connection with Leibnizian Monadology. The egological appearance was set within the pluralistic framework.

In this way, the idea of “intersubjectivity” didn't stay as the problem “between subject and subject”, but migrated to the idea that “object” “in itself” is born “intersubjectively”. This is just the reason why Husserl came in the 1920's to think that his phenomenology so far was only “static” and intended to take the essential structure in the present out, but in order to understand the structure genuinely it must be complemented by a “genetic” investigation. It demanded of him a fundamental change of phenomenological method, and at the same time it brought the above mentioned “subject” into the problematics of “intersubjectivity”. Neither “object” nor “subject” is something which exists independently and later

goes into relationship, rather “subject” is born just within the relationship with “other subjects” and its “genesis” should come into question. In his late period he paraphrased the term “empathy” he loaned from Lipps with the term “other/foreign-experience (Fremderfahrung)”, incidentally speaking, the German word “fremd” means “other” as well as “foreign” or “strange”. And he put not only its structure but also its genesis into question. In this context he found the pass to “others” that were hidden in his theory of time in his later period. This is the idea that Husserl found the pass to “intersubjectivity” in the most central core of “I”, if I may here only suggest it.

So far I've discussed that Husserl's problematics of “intersubjectivity” were connected to traditional or contemporary philosophers. Now I would like to mention that they are intertwined with most of problems he investigated in various ways. Besides what I mentioned already, we can point out their connection to psychology (*Husserliana* vol.9), nature and spirit (*Husserliana* vol.32), theory of time (*Husserliana* vol.10, 33, *Materialien* vol.8), the lifeworld (*Husserliana* vol.6, 39), even if we can't insist that he developed them enough. It is not without reason that *Towards Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity* with totally 1,914 pages are composed of three volumes of *Husserliana* within 40 volumes up to now and overwhelming in his left posthumous manuscripts not only in the quantity but also in the length of period where he discussed it.

6. Ontology and phenomenology

At any rate, why do the problematics of “intersubjectivity” spread their roots so widely in most of problems he investigated in his phenomenology? It must have a reason. One clue for it lies in the nature of “phenomenology”. “Phenomenology” is proposed in contrast to “ontology” above all. If we may say that “ontology” is a question of “What is being?” or “What exists?”, we can say that “phenomenology” is a question of “What is a phenomenon?” or “What appears?”. I would like to compare both situations of saying “Something exists” and saying

“Something appears”. If I say “Something exists”, “For whom” is out of the question, whereas if I say “Something appears”, “For whom” is an indispensable question. Without somebody “for whom something appears” we cannot talk about “appearing” with meaning.

Then, that something appears for A (me) and that it appears for B (the other) are not always the same situation. There is a gap between them which Husserl called “perspective” or “aspect”, in order to point out that the same thing seems to appear, but a subtly different thing appears. And if A grasps it as “appearance for A”, it presupposes already that it has for B a different “appearance for B”. What is more, it means that A grasps the thing as something beyond it which A can't collect into “appearance for A”. Then we see that something appearing in appearance appears as something beyond appearance. What supports this situation is our understanding each other that there is a gap between “appearance for A” and “appearance for B”. It means that problematics of “intersubjectivity” come into the structure of “appearance” in itself.

Then we can see that the problematics of “intersubjectivity” are related to one of fundamental concepts of phenomenology, i.e. the term “intentionality” which Husserl learned from his teacher Franz Brentano. The situation I just mentioned that something appearing in appearance appears as something beyond appearance is another side of the same coin as what Husserl said that consciousness is always “consciousness of something” and intends to something beyond experience. “Intentionality” is not a secondary relationship “between subject and object”, in which both exist independently already, but means a “field” from which “subject and object” come to exist simultaneously. What exists primarily is just the “between” of “intentionality” – the between “subject and object”. The very idea of “intentionality” breaks the dualistic scheme of “subject and object”, and gave birth to the idea of “between”. Thus, we can say that the idea of “intentionality” prepared the phenomenology of “intersubjectivity”. Thus problematics of “intersubjectivity” became the “fundamental problems of phenomenology” and became related to the fundamental concept of phenomenology, i.e. “intentionality”. This is just the clue to

solve why almost every problem Husserl investigated is connected to problematics of “intersubjectivity”.

7. Conclusion

In parallel with my research on “intersubjectivity” of Husserl's phenomenology, since 2002 I have been also engaged with the problem of “caring” as one of concrete fields of “intersubjectivity”. With this term “caring” I don't mean only “nursing” for patients in a narrow sense, but also “caring” in a wider sense including “caring” for children, elderly, people with various disabilities, palliative caring and up to end-of-life caring, or differently speaking, up to “caring for others” in our everyday life, not only for humans but also for animals or plants. In this wide field, from the background of my research of “intersubjectivity”, I have been engaged with thinking how “to live together with others”, what I cannot however unfortunately develop today.

Recently in Japan there was a horrible and abominable incident. In the newspaper reported: “A knife-wielding man went on a rampage early Tuesday at a care facility for people with disabilities in Sagamihara, Kanagawa Prefecture, killing at least 19 people and wounding 25 others, 20 of them seriously, in one of the worst mass killings in modern Japanese history.” (July, 26. 2016) The suspect, a former staff of this care facility for people with intellectual disabilities, hand-delivered on February a written petition to the official residence of the Lower House speaker in Tokyo demanding that people with severe disabilities would be euthanized. It is also reported, he said “I want to kill disabled people as they are worthless, but the government does not give me permission”. I'm afraid that people consider the suspect as a special wicked ghoul, a mentally diseased or a narcotic. In my opinion we should elucidate how he got such an idea and whether he got it from the inner hidden eugenics widely spread in the unconscious zone of normal people as well. From such an investigation we should learn how “to live together with others”. Also in this context, I hope, a research on Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity

could play an important role.

Notes

1. This paper was read at the Renmin University of China, on the 20th September, 2016. I deeply appreciate prof. Li Kelin' s organizing my seminar.