

thinking

togetherness

ANDREJ BOŽIČ (*Ed.*)

THINKING TOGETHERNESS

PHENOMENOLOGY AND SOCIALITY

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Ka-yu Hui

THE EXPRESSIVE STRUCTURE OF THE PERSON IN HUSSERL'S SOCIAL PHENOMENOLOGY

FROM SUBJECTIVE SPIRIT TO CULTURAL SPIRITUAL SHAPE

Abstract: The paper argues that the structure of expression prevails in Husserl's social phenomenology. We begin by considering Husserl's concepts of *Individuum* and *Urgegenstand*, and his project of grounding the human sciences (§1). We then explore the expressive structure of the person in three interrelated aspects. First, expression indicates the peculiar manner of the constitution of the person as a spiritual subject (§2). Second, there is an essential relationship between the person and her surrounding world, and hence not only is the person always given as a system of expressions, but also is a cultural object given as such (§3). Third, the system "person-surrounding world" can also be an expression of communal spiritual life and culture—what Husserl calls "higher order personal unities"—once they are constituted through appropriate communal acts (Conclusion).

Keywords: Edmund Husserl, expression, person, spirit, community.

Introduction

The present paper explores the systematic importance of the concept of expression in Husserl's social phenomenology. We argue that the structure of expression prevails in Husserl's analyses of interpersonal relationships, cultural objects in the surrounding world, and the different levels of community and culture. We will begin by considering Husserl's concepts of *Individuum* and *Urgegenstand*, and his project of grounding the human sciences (§1). After that, we will explore the expressive structure of a person in three interrelated aspects. First, expression indicates the peculiar manner of the constitution of the person as a spiritual subject, in contrast with the constitution of the person as a unity of body and soul (§2). Second, there is an essential relationship

between a person and her surrounding world, and hence not only is a person always given as a system of expressions, but also is a cultural object given as such. In other words, spirit is expressed in the system “person–surrounding world” (§3). Third, the system “person–surrounding world” can also be an expression of communal spiritual life and culture—what Husserl calls “higher order personal unities”—once they are constituted through appropriate communal acts (Conclusion).

I.

118 Let us motivate the inquiry with a brief consideration of the Husserlian phenomenological project of grounding the human sciences. For Husserl, we can secure the foundation of the human sciences and avoid any natural(istic) reduction, only if we can clarify the material ontological difference between the subject matters of the natural sciences and the human sciences. In other words, only if we can show that the region *Natur* (the material ontological region for the natural[istic] sciences) and the region *Geist* (the material ontological region for the human sciences) are two separate and irreducible regions, can the foundation of the human sciences be secured. Hence, the particular task of grounding the human sciences turns out to be a global task of building up ontologies for both nature and spirit.

In *Ideas I*, Husserl spells out some of the most important steps in this task. Roughly put, it consists of two main steps (after, of course, the performance of the *epoché* and the phenomenological reduction). First, the phenomenologist needs to pick an *Individuum*—i.e., a “‘this-here’ whose substantive essence is a concretum” (*Hua III*, 29/2014, 30; see also *Hua IV*, 17/1989, 19). Second, she needs to show that this *Individuum* can be a “primal object” (*Urgegenstand*) that unifies different abstract and concrete essences into a region, such that everything within the region obtains its sense through referring back to this primal object. Husserl helpfully gives us an example of what these formal ontological concepts mean. He writes:

If we transport ourselves into any eidetic science at all, for example, into the ontology of nature, then we find ourselves [...] [oriented]

toward objects of the essences that in our example are classified under the region of nature. We observe thereby [...] that “object” is a title for many different yet interrelated formations, for example, “thing,” “property,” “relation,” “state of affairs,” “set,” “order,” and so forth. These are obviously not equivalent to one another but instead refer back respectively to one kind of object that has, so to speak, the prerogative of being the primordial kind of object, with respect to which all other [objects] present themselves to a certain extent merely as variants. In our example, the thing itself (over against the thingly property, relation, and so forth) naturally has this prerogative. (*Hua III*, 21/2014, 22.)

Put differently, in order to build up an ontology of nature, we need to pick an essence—in our case, thing—and show that: 1.) it is an *Individuum*, and 2.) it is an *Urgegenstand*, from which other essences typically included within the region of nature receive their senses, only if they are related to physical things. As Claudio Majolino helpfully suggests, the members of this region “are either *things*, or *properties* of things, or they are *somehow related to things*—i.e. they refer back (*zurückweisen*) to ‘things’ as *Urgegenstände*” (Majolino 2015, 48). Husserl unambiguously points out that the essence “thing” satisfies the requirements, when he writes:

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The material thing fits under the *logical* category, *pure and simple individuum* (“absolute” object). To it are referred the logical (formal-ontological) modifications: individual property (here, the quality of being a thing), state, process, relation, complexion, etc. In every domain of being, we find analogous variations, and so the goal of phenomenological clarity requires us to go back to the individuum as the primordial objectivity (*Urgegenständlichkeit*). It is from it that all logical modifications acquire their sense-determination. (*Hua IV*, 34/ 1989, 37.)

However, in the case of the region of spirit, it is not clear what counts as the *Urgegenstand*. This paper argues that the person serves this role. The concept of person designates the eidetic singularity of the substance of the region of spirit. The stock of essences, abstract or concrete, typically included in the

world of spirit, acquires sense-determination by referring back to “persons.” The denizens of the world of spirit, from personal individuals as members of a community to cultural objects like books and buildings, to different levels of collectivity like family, nature, and culture, acquire their senses by referring back to the *eidōs* “person.” Furthermore, all of these “objects” stand in an expressive unity with the persons.¹

II.

120 In *Ideas II*, Husserl embarks on an analysis of the experience of another person through empathy (*Einfühlung*). He qualifies the givenness of the lived body (*Leib*) of the other as an “expression” of her psychic life (*Hua IV*, 166/1989, 175). A few sections later, he more explicitly states that “[t]he thoroughly intuitive unity presenting itself when we grasp a person *as such*... is the unity of the ‘*expression*’ and the ‘*expressed*’ that belongs to the essence of all comprehensive unities.” (*Hua IV*, 236/1989, 248.) According to Husserl, a person presents herself to our consciousness as a “double and unitary” (*doppeleinheitliche*) unity, consisting of the sensuous body and the spirit. The two aspects are, however, essentially united. In order to fully understand expressive unity, we have to first contrast it with the conception of the person as a body–soul unity.

Let us start with the similarity between the manner of givenness of spirit and that of the soul. In his now-famous analysis of corporeality, Husserl argues that through double sensation, one can constitute her own lived body (*Leib*) as both a physical thing in the real world and a lived and sensing body (*Hua IV*, 145/1989, 152–153). The “soul,” as a unitary psychic stream that continues

1 To complete the argument, we should devote a separate discussion showing why a person is an *Individuum*. For reasons of space, let us just quote from Husserl the following passage to support the claim: “Terminologically, we distinguish psychological apprehension and experience from human-scientific (personal) apprehension and experience. The Ego that is apprehended ‘psychologically’ is the psychic Ego; the one apprehended in the way of the human sciences, the spiritual sciences, is the personal Ego or the spiritual *individuum*. [*Das Ich als ‘psychisch’ aufgefaßtes ist das seelische, das geisteswissenschaftlich aufgefaßte das personale Ich oder das geistige Individuum.*]” (*Hua IV*, 143/1989, 150; emphasis mine). The rest of the paper argues that “person” is the *Urgegenstand* for the region *Geist*.

to develop in one's life, is constituted as something "introjected" in the lived body (*Hua IV*, 176/1989, 186). What is crucial for our analysis here is that the physical body and the soul are separately substantial and bound together as two systems of predicables united in a founding–founded relationship (*Hua IV*, 32/1989, 35). The soul is a unity of sense (*Sinn*) encompassing a stock of psychic predicables and, for this reason, cannot be reduced to the physical body. But, on the other hand, the soul cannot be given other than as a meaning stratum founded on the physical body.² As a psychological concept, the soul designates a "substantial-real unity" that manifests through different states and modes and has its own "lawfully regulated functionality." For example, one can study how different psychic states and properties (perceptions, sensations, feelings, etc.) connect and what lawful regularities are in this unitary flow. The name of the science, which studies these relations, is psychology.

Like the soul, spirit can neither be given without the body nor be reduced to the body. Husserl points out that spirit is always *apperceived* in a specific manner (*Hua IV*, 142/1989, 149). On the one hand, not only is spirit not sensuously perceived directly at this or that moment, but also is it non-sensible and invisible by essence. On the other hand, spirit cannot be meaningfully intended without some sort of "incarnation," i.e., without incorporating a sensuous body. This double relation between spirit and the body—that spirit is essentially non-sensuous yet necessarily anchored in the body—distinguishes the structure of expression from other kinds of apperception (*Hua IV*, 238/1989, 250). In this regard, Husserl calls a person a "double and unitary" (*doppeleinheitliche*) unity (*Hua IV*, 166/1989, 175).

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However, the apparent similarity in the manner of givenness of the soul and spirit should not be overstated. Husserl maintains that spirit is essentially "expressed" by the body, and they should not be conceived as forming a founding–founded unity (*Hua IV*, 325/1989, 337; *Hua IV*, 204/1989, 215; *Hua I*, 150/1960, 121). The distinction between the two kinds of unity can be explained only if we have clarified the distinction between soul and spirit. There is an inclination to identify the two, while spirit in the robust sense is not a soul. Mastering this

² Husserl convincingly points out that even a ghost needs a "phantom body" to be given (*Hua IV*, 94/1989, 100).

“difficult distinction” is central to the understanding of the distinction

[...] between nature and the world of the spirit, between the natural sciences and the human sciences, the sciences of the spirit, between a natural-scientific theory of the soul on the one hand and theory of the person (theory of the Ego, Egology) as well as the theory of society (theory of community) on the other hand. (*Hua IV*, 172/1989, 181.)

122 We must emphasize that in our experience of a person, the sense of spirit is essential to the whole object, without which the sensuous substrate—the body—will be apprehended differently. Husserl notes: “[...] in the attitude of the human sciences [...] the other spirit is thematically posited as spirit and *not as founded* in the physical Body” (*Hua IV*, 204/1989, 214; emphasis mine). Similar to the soul, a material stratum is necessary for the givenness of a person. Nevertheless, we cannot, in the genuine sense, “take away” the empathizing consciousness intending another person while keeping the sensuous perception of the material substrate—the other’s body—intact. As Sara Heinämaa insightfully points out, Husserl maintains that there are “two separate constitutive paths starting from what is pregiven to the senses” (Heinämaa 2010, 13). Sensuous givenness is involved in the constitution of physical things. However, it can also be taken up in another constitutive path, orchestrated in the constitution of sensuous objects with spiritual meaning (Husserl 1973, 138). Husserl’s point is not that the physical is only a moment *included* in the personal expressive unity; his point is that the category of “the physical” is *excluded* from the apprehension of a person.

The above analysis shows that spirit is not equivalent to a person’s psychic life. According to Husserl, the concept of spirit involves different strata.³ The *elementary* sense of spirit is a “human being as a member of the personal human world” (*Hua IV*, 201/1989, 212). To perceive a person is to apprehend a human being as a member of the personal human world. In the personalistic attitude, the body is not experienced as an indication of inner psychic life; instead, it is the person expressing herself as a person. A gesture is not

3 See also Melle 1996, 29–30.

perceived as a natural event causally connected with and conditioned by the natural world, but as an expression of what the person “thinks.” This expressive gesture is also not perceived as a mere indication of a psychological event, but as a movement bearing social meanings. For instance, in order to understand the meaning of a nod, it is insufficient to only look at the inner psychic life of a person. We must also consider the immediate surrounding world and even the more general social world, in which the person is embedded, such that the meaning of the nod can be fully displayed. There is no inner psychic, no “soul” as a “substantial reality” (*substantielle Realität*) hiding behind the body in our primordial experience of another person in the personalistic attitude. The person cannot be given, first of all, as a physical body, on which is founded the soul. This picture of the person as a unity of body and soul is utterly foreign to our experience of a person in the personalistic attitude.⁴

The body is part of the person and expresses her spiritual life. Therefore, if the surrounding world must be considered in our experience of the person, our account of the structure of expression should include this dimension and the objects therein.

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III.

Husserl argues that the analysis of the expressive structure of the person is a “fundamental analysis *embracing all spiritual Objects, all unities of Body and sense*, hence not only individual humans but also human communities, all cultural formations, all individual and social works, institutions, etc.” (*Hua IV*, 243/1989, 255; cf. 1973, 138). Indeed, Husserl characterizes our experiences of objects like books, theatrical plays, and tools as experiences of “spiritual Objects” or “Objective spirit,” assigning them a status akin to persons (*Hua IV*, 239/1989, 251).

Husserl aptly points out that a person, as a member of the personal human world, “belongs to the surrounding world of things” (*Hua IV*, 204/1989, 214). The surrounding world of a person is a world that consists of things and other persons, and “a man is what he is as a being who maintains himself in his

⁴ Heinämaa also argues for a similar point. See Heinämaa 2017, 339.

commerce with the things of his thingly, and with the persons of his personal, surrounding world” (*Hua IV*, 141/1989, 148). There is a “relation of reciprocal determination between the personal subject and its surrounding world” (*Hua IV*, 321/1989, 333). The meanings of things in one’s surrounding world determine the comportments of the person by motivating her to (re)act in a certain way; the person is, on the other hand, free to manipulate the things in the surrounding world, to bestow on them new meanings. This reciprocal determination defines the person as a member of the personal human world and not as an individual abstracted from worldly relationships with things and people (*Hua IV*, 326/1989, 338). In short, when we experience the person as a person, we always, at the same time, apprehend her relations with the surrounding world.

124 This last point brings us to the realization that if spirit is expressed through/as the body, and if a person is always connected with the surrounding world, the expressive structure encompasses not only the body but also objects in the surrounding world. Differently put, spirit is always expressed in the system “person–surrounding world.” Hence, we can apprehend the spiritual life of another not only through bodily expressions but also through the objects in her surrounding world.

Husserl insightfully points out that the surrounding world is a network of motivations, consisting of different things with different meanings to the person. The person is motivated to act in specific ways, and motivations exist as relations between the personal subject and the object as presented in the person’s consciousness (*Hua IV*, 219–220/1989, 231). In this regard, the person’s spirit can also be expressed in her motivational relationship with objects in the surrounding world. For instance, a friendly personality is immediately discerned in a stranger’s act of holding the door for you. Moreover, objects not in immediate contact with a person can also express her spiritual life. When we enter a person’s house, the decoration on the wall, the books on her bookshelves, the tidiness of the kitchen, etc., can tell us something about this person. Ancient cookware displayed in a museum expresses the spiritual life of the tribe long buried in history.

Crucial here is the double relation of spirit and its sensuous substrate. As we established, a person is not given first as a physical body, to which we subsequently add a distinct spiritual sense. Instead, the sensuous givenness

of the body is immediately apperceived as an expression of a spirit. Likewise, when we perceive an object having “spiritual meaning,” we do not first perceive the physical thing deprived of human meaning. Instead, the spiritual meaning animates the whole of the sensuous given. Husserl emphasizes that unity of expression is neither external nor causal, even though a sensuous (not “physical”) ground must be there as the substratum. With a shift of attitude, one can always turn towards the physical appearance. However, this does not mean that the physical is first perceived, on which we add spiritual meaning. A book is perceived as a book, not because we first perceive a mere physical thing and then add to it the meaning of being a book. We perceive a book immediately as a book, because the sensuous givenness is apprehended directly as a book. In other words, the spiritual and the sensuous “pregiven,” the spirit and the body, are not “bounded” but “fused” together (*Hua IV*, 238/1989, 250). In these cases, the sensuous is essentially included in the spiritual being, not one layer added on top of another. In this regard, the structure of expression that we explained above is also found in spiritual objects.

In some cases, the “substratum is physically unreal and has no existence,” e.g., the harmony of the rhythms of a closet drama (*Hua IV*, 239/1989, 251). A closet drama can have specific spiritual and cultural properties, e.g., being harmonious. However, it does not make sense for someone to ask *where* this property of “being harmonious” is. Husserl’s point is that the category of natural space is inadequate in grasping the spiritual object and its spiritual properties, precisely because the object is not constituted based on any physically real existence; strictly speaking, a closet drama has no physical existence at all. However, there is certainly a layer of sensuous substratum—the book, the words, the actors’ speeches, if we are reading the drama out loud in the rehearsal together—in our intention of the closet drama. Nevertheless, the drama itself is not a physical thing. This once again confirms that spiritual objects are not physical objects, and their sensuous substratum is apprehended as immediately expressive of spiritual meaning.

Once we get rid of the conception that a person is a soul introjected into a physical body, we can see more easily that understanding another person is not so much a matter of “mind-reading,” i.e., accessing her hidden mental states, but a matter of reading the expressions of her spiritual life in her gesticulations,

linguistic expressions, comportments, habits, surrounding objects, etc. Regaining the primordial experience of a person as spiritual expression, the rightful place of “objective spirits” in expressing one’s spiritual life can be restored.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, spirit is a stratified concept. The elementary sense of spirit is the person as a member of the personal human world. Spirit at this level is expressed through the body or objects in the surrounding world. However, Husserl also extends the concept of spirit to encompass what he calls “higher order personal unities,” including family, nation, supranational community, etc. As John Drummond aptly notes, these social collectives consist of individual personal spirits, but the former cannot be reduced to mere aggregations of the latter. Instead, these spiritual unities are unified by specific principles (Drummond 1996, 237–238).

126 The expressivity of an individual personal spirit is thereby complicated. A person can be treated as expressive of her own spiritual life, but she can also be considered a member of a collective. In the latter case, the person is an expression not only of her own spiritual life but also of the “communal spirit” (*Hua IV*, 243/1989, 255). Once the dimension of sociality is introduced in full scale, the expressivity of the system “person–surrounding world” is tremendously multiplied. It will take us too far afield to explicate the constitution of different levels of communalization.⁵ Suffice to say that, with specific “mutual communicative comprehension” and “communicative acts,” different levels of spiritual meaning are constituted and supplied to the communal spiritual world. Hence, gesticulations and comportments of a person (including those towards things in her surrounding world) are not only expressive of her personality; they all now have extra layers of spiritual meaning, expressing also the habitual life form of a community (or even communities of different levels).⁶ As Husserl writes in the Vienna lecture:

5 For helpful analyses, see Szanto 2016, 148–152, and Gotô 2004, 103–104.

6 See also Miettinen 2014, 161.

Personal life means living communalized as I and “we” within a community-horizon, and this in communities of various simple or stratified forms such as family, nation, supranational community. The word life here does not have a physiological sense; it signifies purposeful life accomplishing spiritual products: in the broadest sense, creating culture in the unity of a historical development. (*Hua VI*, 314–315/1970, 270.)

At the highest level, the individual personal spirits can be unified into a “cultural spiritual shape,” of which the “spiritual Europe” is always Husserl’s favorite example (*Hua VI*, 318–319/1970, 273–374).

In this regard, expression transcends the restriction in the individual surrounding world and becomes the global structure of the world of spirit. Not only can an individual spiritual life, but also can the communal spirit be expressed by persons and cultural objects.

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“The publication edited by Andrej Božič on *Thinking Togetherness. Phenomenology and Sociality* presents a novel and up-to-date account of phenomenology, which comprehends this philosophy as an essentially intersubjective or a communal enterprise; in the volume, phenomenology exceeds narrow limits of subjective life of consciousness, and focuses on various phenomena connected to the public, communal, and political spheres. [...] The book can serve both as a textbook in the heritage of the phenomenological movement and as a collection of original studies.”

Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Witold Płotka**

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